

This electronic thesis or dissertation has been downloaded from the King's Research Portal at <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/>



The anatomy of the abyss : Kierkegaard, modernity and the self before God

Podmore, Simon David

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author and no quotation from it or information derived from it may be published without proper acknowledgement.

END USER LICENCE AGREEMENT



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International licence. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

You are free to:

- Share: to copy, distribute and transmit the work

Under the following conditions:

- Attribution: You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).
- Non Commercial: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- No Derivative Works - You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

Any of these conditions can be waived if you receive permission from the author. Your fair dealings and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

The Anatomy of the Abyss:
Kierkegaard, Modernity, and the Self Before God

Simon David Podmore
Department of Theology and Religious Studies
King's College, University of London
For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

One must obtain forgiveness for every essay in theology. In all senses.

Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*

The joy in the thought that before God a man is always in the wrong.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Gospel of Sufferings*



Abstract

This thesis attempts to explore a theological anthropology devised principally from a theological reading of the works of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). It is argued that Kierkegaard's writings testify to the modern fixation upon the 'self', whilst proposing a theological anthropology that constitutes an attempted recovery from the modern drive for self-possession via isolated introspection. It is the failure of the self to grasp itself through self-reflection that engenders the dialectics of 'anxiety', 'melancholy', and 'despair' which potentially initiate the self's authentic self-becoming 'before God'. Kierkegaard's works are thus read as negatively transcribing the failure of the modern self to authenticate itself whilst positively indicating towards a relational theological anthropology which re-situates authentic self-consciousness in relation to an Other.

However, the decisive point for selfhood is that the 'other' before whom one stands is the God who is ostensibly 'Wholly Other': the God whom the self must initially experience its estrangement from. This alienation is expounded by Kierkegaard in terms of the 'infinite qualitative difference' between humanity and God – an abyss which Kierkegaard identifies as sin. In attempting to anatomise this abyss which confronts the self, Kierkegaard's category is placed in dialogue with antecedent and subsequent interpretations of the 'Wholly Other' and human-divine *alterity* as found in Luther, Hegel, Feuerbach, Karl Barth, Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade, Thomas Altizer, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida.

Ultimately, it is argued that while sin postulates the infinite difference, the forgiveness of sin signifies the overcoming of the abyssal estrangement of the 'Wholly Other', but not the abolition of the essential *alterity* (or *mysterium*) of the divine. Essentially, once the abyss of sin is transcended by the 'self' affirming gift of forgiveness, the true meaning of the infinite difference and God's *Holy* Otherness is revealed in the unfathomable and 'impossible' mystery of the atonement.

Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Abbreviations	5
Prologue: Gazing Into the Kierkegaardian Abyss	6
Introduction: Theological Anthropology and the Abyss of the Post/modern	14
Chapter One: The Inner Abyss	31
Chapter Two: The Abyss of Melancholy	67
Chapter Three: The Melancholy Theophany	90
Chapter Four: The Allegory of Yisra'el	116
Chapter Five: The Anatomy of <i>Anfæcthung</i>	147
Chapter Six: The Gaze of the Abyss	171
Appendix: Postscript On Forgiveness and the Final Question of the Other	191
Bibliography	195

Acknowledgements

[B]ut what madness, when he who himself has lost the eternal wants to heal him who is at the extremity of sickness unto death.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 25

The title of this thesis inevitably pays homage to Robert Burton's epic *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, and is itself not without some of this book's sense of irony. The 'Abyss' in question is specifically the 'infinite qualitative abyss' between humanity and God in Kierkegaard's writings; but it also, more generally, evokes the 'abyss' of meaning which haunts the post/modern. It is to this end that the title also reflects my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Murray Rae, who, in response to one of my numerous abyssal moments of doubt, conveyed to me that theology discovers and fulfils one of its tasks in the activity of naming that which confronts us. As such, this thesis represents an attempt to name – or to anatomise – something which is too often veiled by darkness. Nothing more nor less.

This thesis has been made possible by an award from The Arts and Humanities Research Board and a King's College Humanities Research Studentship. It would also have been a far more arduous undertaking had it not been for Research Fellowships at the Hong and Hong Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf College, Minnesota in the summers of 2002 and 2004. I am always grateful for the welcome, support, and sustenance received and the particular generosity of Cynthia Lund and Prof. Gordon Marino. My gratitude must also go to those who have educated, motivated, aided, supported and inspired my thinking during recent years. I especially wish to thank Prof. Alan Torrance, Prof. Daphne Hampson, Susan Miller and Debbie Reynolds from the University of St. Andrews. I am also grateful for the King's College Research Institute in Systematic Theology and Prof. Colin Gunton whose inspiration is sadly missed. I am also indebted to Dr. Daniel Rynhold for indulging me in discussion of the interface with Jewish philosophy and to Dr. Christopher Hamilton for a final reading. Thanks are also due to the Søren Kierkegaard Society of the United Kingdom, particularly to Dr. Hugh Pyper, Dr. Steve Shakespeare, Dr. John Lippitt, and Prof. Roger Poole who is also sadly missed. Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude to Alexander Marr, James Rankine, Prof. Robert Perkins, Leo Stan, Tamara Monet-Marx, and all my friends for each indulging me in various ways. This simply would not have happened without the support and love of my parents, Keith and Edith, and my brother, Jonathan. Was it worth it?

Finally, I dedicate this work to Sarah, whose love has nurtured me for too brief a time. Without your support, enthusiasm, humour, compassion, and infinite grace and generosity of spirit I do not know where I would be. Thank you for everything. Bless you for being the greatest blessing my life has known.

For Sarah.

Abbreviations for Works by Søren Kierkegaard (See bibliography for full details)

AN	<i>Armed Neutrality and An Open Letter.</i>
AUC	<i>Kierkegaard's Attack Upon 'Christendom'.</i>
CA	<i>The Concept of Anxiety.</i>
BA	<i>The Book on Adler. In Fear and Trembling and The Book on Adler.</i>
CD	<i>Christian Discourses and The Lillies of the Field and the Birds of the Air, and Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays.</i>
CUP	<i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript.</i>
CI	<i>The Concept of Irony: With Constant Reference to Socrates.</i>
E/O I-II	<i>Either/Or, 2 vols.</i>
EUD	<i>Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses.</i>
FSE	<i>For Self-Examination. In For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourself! and Three Discourses.</i>
FT	<i>Fear and Trembling. In Fear and Trembling and The Book on Adler.</i>
JFY	<i>Judge For Yourself! In For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourself! and Three Discourses.</i>
JP	<i>Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, 7 Volumes. (Followed by volume number and entry number: e.g. JP 2:1383. References to Alexander Dru's translation of <i>The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard – A Selection</i> cite Dru's reference number in brackets.)</i>
Pap.	<i>Papirer. (Followed by reference to volume, section, and number in standard Danish edition: e.g. Pap. X¹ A 59)</i>
PF	<i>Philosophical Fragments. In Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus.</i>
PV	<i>The Point of View For My Work as an Author.</i>
PC	<i>Practice in Christianity.</i>
R	<i>Repetition.</i>
SUD	<i>The Sickness Unto Death.</i>
SLW	<i>Stages on Life's Way.</i>
TA	<i>Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and The Present Age (A Literary Review).</i>
UDVS	<i>Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits.</i>
WA	<i>Without Authority.</i>
WL	<i>Works of Love.</i>

Prologue: Gazing Into the Kierkegaardian Abyss

Precisely because there is an absolute difference between God and man, man will express his own nature most adequately when he expresses this difference absolutely.¹

Any endeavour to articulate a Kierkegaardian theological anthropology will find itself gazing into an abyss. It is this Kierkegaardian motif which I shall broach before introducing the central issues of this thesis. The abyss which sooner or later one encounters in Kierkegaard cannot be subsumed under nothingness; it is not a void, though at times it may resemble one and may at all times threaten to become one.² This abyss may be spoken of as a nothingness, an absence; but it also designates a discernible space, albeit infinite, between humanity and God. For how could one anatomise nothingness? And why an anatomy? An anatomy involves a dissection [from Greek *anatome* – ‘dissection’], and a dissection requires a cutting apart [from Latin *dissecare* – ‘to cut into pieces’]; hence the severance of the abyss is implied in its anatomisation – the infinite severance between God and humanity. This anatomy requires that one speak not only of divinity and humanity, but of the severance between them: divinity and humanity on two sides of a chasm. But this anatomy is no detached science. It is inescapably a self-examination, an “autopsy of faith.”³

Although there is no singular unified concept of ‘the abyss’ in Kierkegaard’s writings, its recurrently enthralling image is one which Kierkegaard persistently evokes with stylistic flourish and existential pathos. Constantine Constantius, for example, writes of “the abyss of anxiety”⁴ – an axiom which recalls the vertigo of anxiety’s gazing into the abyss in Vigilius Haufniensis’s *The Concept of Anxiety*: “Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss [*svælgende Dyb*] becomes dizzy.”⁵ Despite this vertiginous horror, however, one who is “educated by anxiety” discovers what Haufniensis calls “Anxiety as Saving through Faith”. Such a person, though they may sink in the abyss, in turn emerges “from the depth of the abyss [*Afgrundens Dyb*] lighter than all the troublesome and terrible things in life.”⁶ It is not the abyss which is dreadful in itself; more precisely it is in the *relation* of the individual to the abyss where anxiety is located. The dizziness of anxiety is essentially derived from the subject’s *gaze* into the abyss. “But what is the reason [*Grunden* – ‘the ground’] for this? It is as much in his own eye as in the abyss [*Afgrunden* – ‘without ground’], for suppose he had not looked down.”⁷

As the above references in *The Concept of Anxiety* demonstrate, the English word “abyss” translates both the Danish *Dyb* and also the more psychological and pathologically horrifying *Afgrund*

¹ CUP, 369

² For an examination of the ‘void’ as an experience of nothingness in modernity see George Pattison, *Agnosis: Theology in the Void*.

³ PF, 70

⁴ R, 155

⁵ CA, 61. See also John M. Hoberman, ‘Kierkegaard on Vertigo’, ed. Robert L. Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary Volume 19: The Sickness Unto Death* where Hoberman explores how the metaphor of vertigo is employed throughout Kierkegaard’s writings “as a phenomenological rendering of several kinds of psychological (and, ultimately, religious) disorientation. What is more, it has analogues within the conceptual repertory of the authorship and is thereby conjoined by Kierkegaard with ideas that are of central importance to his thinking, such as freedom, guilt, anxiety, possibility, ambiguity, faith, and the limits of reason.”(185)

⁶ CA, 158

[literally ‘without ground’] in Kierkegaard’s writings. While *Dyb* often denotes empty space or depth, *Afgrund* evokes the intangible and paradoxical presence of something exceeding mere ‘emptiness’ [*Tomhed*]. As such, “abyss” can refer not only to spatial separation but also to that which is dramatically groundless, bottomless, fathomless, inscrutable [*uudgrundelige*] – hence Johannes Climacus’s use of the word when describing how “humanly speaking, consequences built upon a paradox are built upon the abyss [*Afgrund*]”.⁸ One may thus be tempted to suggest that *Afgrund* is used to denote groundlessness while *Dyb* denotes distance or severance. In the discourse entitled ‘The Joy of It: that One Suffers Only Once But Is Victorious Eternally’, Kierkegaard explains how “just as there was a chasmic abyss [*svælgende Dyb*] between the rich man in hell and Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom, so also is there a chasmic difference [*svælgende Forskjel*] between suffering and sin.”⁹ Yet, when a more psychological phenomena is to be described, the abyss is invoked as something horrifyingly without ground [*Afgrund*]. Hence, when implying the vanity of the maxim ‘Let us eat and drink, because tomorrow we shall die’ (1 Corinthians 15:32), Kierkegaard discerns: “This very remark echoes with the anxiety about the next day, the day of annihilation, the anxiety that insanely is supposed to signify joy although it is a shriek from the abyss [*Afgrund*].”¹⁰ The abyss [*Afgrund*] designates not only the vacuity and implicit despair of decadent or hedonistic indulgence but also its inherent anxiety of non-being.

However, one must be cautious against inferring too firm a formal distinction from what is also a stylistic choice of word – hence Haufniensis’s emphatic combination of both terms in evoking “the depth of the abyss [*Afgrundens Dyb*].”¹¹ Kierkegaard writes in the discourse on ‘The Care of Loftiness’, “The eminent pagan with his care belongs in the abyss [*Afgrund*]; he actually is not lofty but in the abyss [*Afgrund*].”¹² And yet this image is also developed spatially, according to a sense of untraversable distance: “Over this abyss [*Afgrund*] [of paganism] no bird could fly; it would have to perish on the way.”¹³ One may recall the poetic elegiac lament of the aesthete A when describing the abyss of boredom: “My soul is like the dead sea, over which no bird can fly; when it has flown midway, then it sinks down to death and destruction.”¹⁴ Indeed it is the image of the sea – expansive, deep, dark and boundlessly fluid – which perhaps provides the consummate motif for the anxious abyss of existence. “Ah, like the shipwrecked man who has saved himself by a plank, and thus, tossed by the waves, hovering over the abyss, between life and death, gazes fixedly at the land – so should a man be concerned for his salvation.”¹⁵ Here one cannot help but invoke the abyss resounding in the famously evocative horror of what Kierkegaard identifies as “one of my favourite phrases, which is attributed to

⁷ CA, 61

⁸ PF, 98

⁹ CD, 102-103

¹⁰ ‘The Care of Self-Torment’, CD, 77

¹¹ CA, 158. One may also speak of the adjective *afgrundsdyb* [abysmal].

¹² CD, 58

¹³ CD, 59

¹⁴ E/O I, 30

¹⁵ ‘Now We Are Nearer Our Salvation... Than When We Became Believers’, CD, 227

another author [Frater Taciturnus]”¹⁶: that is, to be out over 70,000 fathoms of water. Indeed the abyss [Dyb] commonly refers to the deep.

Kierkegaard’s favored allegory encapsulates the anxious dual-nature of the human condition: “man is a synthesis of the temporal and of the eternal, every moment out upon ‘70,000 fathoms’.”¹⁷ More specifically for Johannes Climacus, the phrase signifies “the martyrdom of believing against the understanding, the mortal danger of lying out on 70,000 fathoms of water, and only there finding God.”¹⁸ This suffering, which is the essential expression of the God-relationship, “is, to recall Frater Taciturnus’s words, the 70,000 fathoms of water upon whose depths the religious person is continually.”¹⁹ It is Frater Taciturnus’s ‘Letter to the Reader’ in *Stages On Life’s Way* which devises the term which so pleases Kierkegaard and his other pseudonymous conspirators: “Spiritual existence, especially the religious, is not easy; the believer continually lies out on the deep [Dybet], has 70,000 fathoms of water beneath him.”²⁰ And yet, despite this anxious abyss [Dyb], hovering over the deep [Dybet], repentance is itself an infinite opening in the religious life which is the pathway to salvation, “for repentance has specifically created a boundless space [uendelig Plads], and as a consequence the religious contradiction: simultaneously to be out on 70,000 fathoms of water and yet be joyful.”²¹

The ‘boundless space’ of repentance begins to convey the sense in which sin induces a profound severance between humanity and God – a rupture which also procures a related internal fracture within the self. Fundamentally, in the task of becoming a self before God, the decisive abyss which theological anthropology is confronted by within the Kierkegaardian *oeuvre* is the insurmountable difference/distance between humanity and God described as *sin*. The god whom Johannes Climacus describes is decisively “absolutely different [absolut forskjelligt]”²² from any person who may wish to relate to it. “What, then, is the difference?” Johannes ponders, “Indeed, what else but sin, since the difference, the absolute difference, must have been caused by the individual himself.”²³ While Johannes Climacus is fond of reminding us that between God and humanity “there exists an absolute difference”²⁴, it is also an insistence he has in common with his ‘higher’ namesake Anti-Climacus: “God and man are two qualities separated by an infinite qualitative difference [uendelig Qualitets-Forskjel].”²⁵ Furthermore, at the risk of ostensibly homogenising Kierkegaard’s authorship via this qualitative difference, it must be emphasised that this idea is not exclusive to the Climacean works. For example, in *The Book On Adler* Kierkegaard himself asserts how “between God and a human being there is an eternal essential qualitative difference [evig væsentlig kvalitativ Forskjel]”²⁶.

¹⁶ BA, 107-108. Kierkegaard applies this phrase to Adler: “He truly is shaken; he is in mortal danger... he is out over 70,000 fathoms of water.” By contrast, “[Bishop] Mynster has never been out on 70,000 fathoms of water and learned out there; he has always clung to the established order and now has completely coalesced with it.” JP 5:5961 / Pap. VIII¹ A 221

¹⁷ JP 5:5792 / Pap. VI B 18

¹⁸ CUP 1:232

¹⁹ CUP 1:288

²⁰ SLW, 444

²¹ SLW, 477

²² PF, 46

²³ PF, 47

²⁴ CUP, 439

²⁵ SUD, 126

²⁶ BA, 181

The difference is one which also asserts itself in Kierkegaard's *Discourses*: for instance, 'The Gospel of Sufferings' relates how the Christian knows that, as far as suffering is concerned, between God and every person there is "an eternal difference [*evig Forskjel*]".²⁷ This difference is described by various permutations: absolute [*absolut*]; eternal [*evig*]; essential [*væsentlig*]; qualitative [*qualitativ*]; infinite [*uendelig*]. While each word in itself is far from synonymous with the others, there is a case to be made that these substitutions and embellishments represent more stylistic adjectival permutations than crucial deviations from the emphatic central idea. This is not to say that Johannes Climacus' understanding of the "absolute difference" is identical with Anti-Climacus' understanding of the "infinite qualitative difference" (indeed I intimate that the understanding of the former is not resolved to the same depth as the latter).²⁸

However, to infer too much from the choice of one word over another is the constant temptation of the non-native speaker – a particular danger in the case of so poetic and stylistic a composer as Kierkegaard. So, for instance, there is an insistent string of these words in Kierkegaard's journals when describing "the law of the relations between God and man in the God-relationship": "There is an infinite, radical, qualitative difference [*uendelig svælgende qualitativ Forskjel*] between God and man."²⁹ Additionally here is an instance of another deeply evocative adjective for this difference: "radical" [*svælgende*]. However, the translation of "radical" does not fully convey the evocation of this word which, one might say, is decidedly abyssal. As the Danish word *slugt* – which denotes a "gorge" – is close to the verb *sluge* "to swallow", so too can *svælg* denote "abyss" in a manner close to the verb *svælge* – also a verb for swallowing. Hence, it might be better to talk about "an infinite, swallowing/yawning, qualitative difference." The benefit of suggesting this image is that it prompts the very anxiety inherent to relating to an Other and concomitantly to oneself across such a yawning abyss [*et svælgende dyb*] – as is translated in the above reference from *The Concept of Anxiety*: "He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss [*svælgende Dyb*] becomes dizzy."³⁰ Anti-Climacus also summons just this image when he writes how "As sinner, man is separated from God by the most chasmic qualitative abyss [*Qualitetens meest svælgende Dyb*]."³¹

In attempting to define one's existence before God one must come to terms with the abyssal distance which separates humanity from divinity. Any attempt to bring two things together between which there is such an abyssal difference entails a vertigo of the understanding in its attempt to cross the abyss: "We warn the person who stands on a ship which ploughs ahead with the speed of the storm that he should not look into the waves, for he will become dizzy; thus does the comparison between the infinite and the finite make a man dizzy."³² It is across such a seemingly impossible abyss of sin that one must come to relate to God. It is not in attempting to possess myself, or to speculate after God, that

²⁷ UDVS, 287

²⁸ For example, the phrase "absolute [*absolut*] difference" is mostly confined to the writings of Johannes Climacus, whilst the rest of the authorship tends to favour a variation upon an "eternal [*evig*]" or "infinite [*uendelig*]" difference.

²⁹ JP 2:1383 / Pap. X¹ A 59

³⁰ CA, 61

³¹ SUD, 122

³² WL, 180

I become known as a self; it is first of all through coming to terms with the infinite difference itself – that is, the apprehension of the abyss itself as the consciousness of sin.

But one must be careful not to become lost in looking down for one will become dizzy; or, recalling Nietzsche's stylistically famous warning, "when you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you."³³ And yet, to a point, this is what Kierkegaard proposes must be done in much fear and trembling and spiritual trial. Nietzsche writes that "Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman [*Übermensch*] – a rope over an abyss [German *Abgrund* – again literally 'without ground']."³⁴ The existential difference, according to Hoberman, is that "Nietzsche situates man over the abyss, while Kierkegaard situates the abyss within man."³⁵ This is true in relation to the internal vertigo of anxiety; but where the God-relation is concerned Kierkegaard also inscribes the individual over 70,000 fathoms, or severed from God by an infinite chasmic abyss of sin: an internal abyss which nevertheless severs one from an *other*. Authentic self-consciousness is contingent upon consciousness of God, or self before God; but this is itself only possible through the consciousness of sin – the gaze of the abyss. But this penetrating gaze into the abyss, in which the abyss also penetrates the eye which looks into it, may become an entrapment of self-reflection which loses sight of the other (God) whom the abyss severs us from. Such guilt may come to signify "the demonic": what Vigilius Haufniensis calls "anxiety about the good" self-incarcerated in "inclosing reserve [*Indesluttethed*]"³⁶ The task then is to break guilt out of its anxious self-communion with the abyss. But this hypnotic introversion is not easily ruptured since "Guilt has for the eye of the spirit the fascinating power of the serpent's glance."³⁷ Therefore the internal contemplation of the abyss of sin itself, the gaze of guilt, becomes a Narcissistic dizziness. "The continuity that inclosing reserve has can best be compared with the dizziness a spinning top must have, which constantly revolves upon its own pivot."³⁸ One might call this the dizziness of the internal abyss – it is, in one sense, we ourselves who own this abyss between self and God since we are the cause of it, though, inevitably, the abyss will come to own us. But more of this in due course. The anxiety of this self-oriented inclosing reserve [*Indesluttethed*] must ultimately deliver its gaze towards the other. Sin must be authentically understood, not through guilt's introspective and serpentine self-fascination, but relationally, as the distance that separates the sinner from God.

And still, the paradox – or unsurpassable chasm – is such that the self must become known to itself in relation to that which is infinitely differentiated from it. It is in this sense that Johannes Climacus initially calls the god "the unknown". The anxious and despairing task is one of becoming an authentic self before a God whose absolute otherness apparently defies any such relation. Yet how can I know myself in relation to that which is unknowable? "[I]f a human being is to come to know something about the unknown (the god) [*det Ubekjendte (Guden)*], he must first come to know that it is

³³ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 89

³⁴ 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra: First Part, 4, *The Portable Nietzsche*, 126

³⁵ 'Kierkegaard on Vertigo', 202

³⁶ CA, 123

³⁷ CA, 103

³⁸ CA, 130

different from him, absolutely different from him.”³⁹ Yet how can one come to know anything about this God since “the understanding cannot even think the absolutely different”?⁴⁰

This is the abyss of an apparently unassailable *alterity* and alienation which this theological anthropology must confront if it wishes to define itself before a God who is, at least initially, ‘Wholly Other’. “At this point we seem to stand at a paradox”, Johannes Climacus insists, “Just to come to know that the god is the different, man needs the god and then comes to know that the god is infinitely different from him.”⁴¹ In other words, the *alterity* of the absolutely different is not something I can come to know of myself, even though I myself as sinner am the cause of this abyss of absolute difference. Consequently, the consciousness of sin, which is also the consciousness of human-Divine *alterity* conceived as alienation, cannot come via introspection but only as the gift of God. And it is in the consciousness of sin via divine revelation rather than introspection that one receives also the gift of forgiveness: the hand which reaches out across the impossible abyss. As Kierkegaard formulates “the law of the relations between God and man in the God-relationship”:

DIVISIO

There is an infinite, radical, qualitative difference between God and man.

This means, or the expression for this is: the human person achieves absolutely nothing; it is God who gives everything; it is he who brings about a person’s faith, etc.

This is grace, and this is Christianity’s major premise.⁴²

However, as shall be explored, the consciousness of the infinite qualitative difference is always at risk of subverting into a dreadful yawning abyss into which one’s gaze may fall continually. The abyss of sin may itself induce the very despair Kierkegaard’s writings strive to alleviate. Standing before God, the Wholly Other against Whom one had previously been defended by the distance of the abyss, may seem more like losing oneself in crushing annihilation than becoming oneself in relation. This is reflected by the warning in Kierkegaard’s “SUBDIVISIO” to the above: “If the *Divisio* is everything, then God is so infinitely sublime [*uendelig ophøiet*] that there is no intrinsic or actual relationship between God and the individual human being.”⁴³ As shall be seen, when the infinite qualitative abyss is understood only in part or received in “offence”, then God may seem so Wholly Other, so “absolutely different”, so “infinitely sublime” as to appear as irremediably and essentially a God of despair.

The abyss [*Dyb*] describes our severance and distance from God, but it is also, I suggest, an abyss [*Afgrund*] into which one may fall, in which one loses the ground [*grund*] on which one may stand before God. In the endeavour of the God-relationship, God can become so dreadful, so “infinitely sublime” to the mind’s eye that, adopting Rudolf Otto’s terms, the awe of the *mysterium tremendum* subverts into the awfulness of the *mysterium horrendum*. The danger is that God becomes so dreadfully and irreconcilably Wholly Other to the self that one becomes swallowed up by the horror of this infinite qualitative abyss. God becomes the God of a fantastic despair that cannot reconcile itself to the *mysterium* of divine forgiveness: God is thought of as irrevocably other. The gaze into the infinite

³⁹ PF, 46

⁴⁰ PF, 45

⁴¹ PF, 46

⁴² JP 2:1383 / Pap. X¹ A 59

abyss of sin has become an intoxication in which standing as a self before God is thought of primarily in terms of the abyss itself. This fatal abyss is a form of what Anti-Climacus calls “the second severance.”⁴⁴

It is at this edge that the thesis reaches in its concluding chapter. The question of the self before God is one of receiving the revelation of the infinite qualitative difference between self as sinner and God as the Wholly Other in such a way as to come to terms with the grace by which one becomes a self in relation rather than annihilation. Such a task involves theological anthropology in a careful anatomising of the abyss: not simply in terms of a doctrine of sin, but a mutual interrogation of and by the infinite abyss which separates the sinner from God and which holds the paradoxical secret of our forgiveness. It is here that the gaze of the abyss hopes to see with ‘the eyes of faith.’

But before reaching this point, much remains in this anatomy. Chapter One initially considers the Kierkegaardian view of the failure of self-authentication as despair and the conviction of eternity’s obligation to become a self ‘before God’ in relation to the modern turn towards the ‘Know Thyself’ and its virtually concomitant collapse into the ‘death of the self’. The relation between the ‘death of the self’ and ‘the death of God’ is itself considered in relation to Kierkegaard’s infinite qualitative difference. In considering God in Kierkegaard’s writings as the Wholly Other, comparison is made with Jacques Derrida’s reading of the wholly other as referring to the *alterity* of every other, and Rudolf Otto’s view of the Wholly Other as *mysterium*. In doing so, I introduce the central argument that the difference of sin should be understood as ‘estrangement’, and that ‘forgiveness’ is itself the transfigured and authentic meaning of the infinite qualitative abyss between self and God.

In Chapter Two, the theme of melancholy is established as a response to the modern loss of God and turn towards an unobtainable self. This tendency is traced through the displacement of metaphysics and cosmology to the retreat into interiority. The movement towards a modern religious melancholy is further sketched from the monastic tradition of *acedia* to the boredom of the modern aesthete. Through the anatomy of melancholy in Kierkegaard’s writings, I propose a move from the aesthetic to the religious which directs melancholy towards a potentially curative awakening metamorphosis of spirit.

The theme of melancholy continues in Chapter Three which begins with an examination of the economy of the *ekstasis* of the God-relationship and the grief of descent back into ‘the world’. Here a religious melancholy is characterised by a rise in the restless and antagonistic longing of spirit – a longing which the self is unable to fully consummate. This melancholy is epitomised by the desire to behold the Face of God, though to see God means death – an anguish particularly evident in Augustine and John of the Cross. The melancholy sense of the ostensible absence of God is translated into more modern concerns through consideration of Levinas’s ‘enigma of the trace’, Mark C. Taylor’s ‘postmodern a/theology of erring’, and the ‘Wholly Other’ of Mircea Eliade and Rudolf Otto. I examine whether the Wholly Other, particularly as rehabilitated by Otto, effectively signifies a response to a *deus otiosus* and the melancholy of a modern *horror vacui*. Essentially, I argue that the

⁴³ JP 2:1383 / Pap. X¹ A 59

⁴⁴ SUD, 109

Wholly Other, as read in Kierkegaard, creates the space for the gift of the self – albeit a self which, in fear and trembling, must enter into a struggle with the *mysterium tremendum*.

In Chapter Four – in many ways the nucleus of the argument – the thesis considers the image of Jacob's struggle with the stranger [Genesis 32] as an allegory for the *Anfechtung* of the infinite difference between self and God: an allegory which also evokes the reconciliation of this estrangement through the divine gift of a God who, by giving of Godself in the tangibility of struggle, negates Wholly Otherness whilst also creating the space for the self to become itself. This allegory is examined in relation to the estrangement of Hegel's Unhappy Consciousness, the antitheism of Proudhon, and the divine-human tension in Kierkegaard's category of 'spiritual trial' [*Anfægtelse*]. It is through Kierkegaard's notion of the stigmatic 'thorn in the flesh' that I proceed to discuss the vertiginous anxiety of the God-relationship, the intoxication of the imagination and the analogy of the sublime – a category which, in the context of the self before God, I suggest is more appropriately supplanted by Otto's notion of the 'numinous'.

Chapter Five constitutes a more detailed anatomy of Kierkegaard's dialectic of *Anfægtelse* and its relation to the Lutheran tradition of *Anfechtung*. The essential difference between Kierkegaard and Luther at this point transpires as Kierkegaard's situating of the tension of *Anfægtelse* between the individual and God, rather than the devil. Both thinkers are, however, unified in looking to the trial of Christ's God-forsakenness as the exemplar of the individual's struggle with *Anfechtung*. It is here, when *Anfægtelse* causes the love of God to come into doubt, that the struggle of prayer emerges as the means for the self to transcend the despair over human impossibility through faith in divine possibility.

In the final chapter, I attempt to condense the previous anatomisation of the self's relation 'before God' through an examination of the optical motif which suffuses the entire thesis. In this sense, the self before God is appraised in terms of 'the gaze': the 'gaze of the abyss' by which the self beholds the chasmic infinite difference; the internalised 'gaze of despair' by which the self, in 'offense' against its perceived sinfulness, severs itself from any relation to the other; and ultimately, the downcast gaze which, in humility, beholds the God – whom 'none may see and live' – through 'the eyes of faith'. It is this gaze which penetrate the darkness of the abyss and with which the self comes to see itself reflected through the 'divine mirror' as a forgiven self becoming itself before God.

However, it is first of all incumbent that these questions are placed within the context in which they are asked. As such, in the Introduction, I attempt to establish some of the abysses and *aporias* which confront a contemporary theological anthropology: 'the death of God'; the relation of divine and human suffering; deconstruction etc. My contention is that, in the darkness of the abyss of the post/modern, theology must suspend ontotheology and derive its orientation anthropocentrically – an inevitably melancholy expression of the infinite qualitative difference.

Introduction: Theological Anthropology and the Abyss of the Post/modern

If we are honest, we must admit that it is no longer clear whether theology has a future. More precisely, it is no longer clear whether theology has a future that involves anything more than an impossible repetition of the past.⁴⁵

The Abyss of God/Metaphysics?

Post/modernity has endured many new meanings for the abyss since Kierkegaard's infinite qualitative difference. Not least, as Grace M. Jantzen has observed, is "the imaginary of the abyss which haunts postmodernism": an abyss which for Nietzsche and the inheritors of his dark legacy is accompanied by a "shiver of horror... the dread of nihilism."⁴⁶ It is the abyss of collapsing metaphysical Truths in which, in Jantzen's words, "The bottomless pit swallows up foundations and grounds for certainty."⁴⁷ And it is in the night of Nietzsche's 'death of God' that the abyss is most acutely sounded as the note of a vertiginous cry of anxiety in the face of metaphysical absence:

What were we doing when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not staring as through an infinite nothing?⁴⁸

According to Nietzsche, metaphysics begins in dreaming. As Plato conceptualises the dream-world as metaphysics, this world pales in comparison – as appearance, as removed from Truth. Immanence is lived in deluded longing for transcendence. "The true world – we have abolished", Nietzsche pronounces, "What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! *With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.*"⁴⁹ However, what Wessel Stoker calls "an *aporia* with regard to the ascription of meaning"⁵⁰ prompts an anxiety for Nietzsche which is actually a precursor to Dionysiac joy. Ultimately in Nietzsche, *amor fati* transfigures the disorienting dark night of the nihilistic abyss into a celebration of reclaimed metaphysical absence. Philosophers and "free spirits" may now set sail upon this uninhibited ocean: "at last our ships may venture out again... the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an 'open sea.'"⁵¹

Nietzsche is welcome to celebrate his venture into the abyss, but for many the closure of this opening is beginning around his death on August 25th 1899 – at the advent of the twentieth century. For many living through and after this century, such joy and faith in the *Übermensch* is impossible; the abyss takes on an incumbent and unprecedented darkness in the smoke of world war and Holocaust.

⁴⁵ Mark C. Taylor, 'Postmodern Times', ed. Orrin F. Summerell, *The Otherness of God*, 174

⁴⁶ Grace M. Jantzen, 'Eros and the Abyss: Reading Medieval Mystics in Postmodernity', *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 17, No. 3, September 2003, 245

⁴⁷ 'Eros and the Abyss: Reading Medieval Mystics in Postmodernity', 245

⁴⁸ *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1974), III.125, p.181. Cited in Jantzen, 'Eros and the Abyss: Reading Medieval Mystics in Postmodernity', 256.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, 'How the 'True World Finally Became a Fable: The History of an Error', 'Twilight of the Idols', *The Portable Nietzsche*, 486. For Heidegger, however, Nietzsche actually fails to emancipate himself from the western metaphysical tradition. In the 'will-to-power' there remains, as John Peacocke explains, "the juxtaposition of the two components that represent the essential elements of all metaphysical thinking in the West: value and ground." 'Heidegger and the Problem of Onto-Theology', ed. Philip Blond, *Post-Secular Philosophy*, 185

⁵⁰ *Is the Quest for Meaning the Quest for God?*, 2

Whilst the Nietzschean act of deicide may be read as ennobling man as slayer of God, the act of genocide signifies his self-inflicted degeneration. It is this event which stands as an historical and spiritual abyss – a lacuna of faith – between the death of God as Nietzsche and even Kierkegaard understood it and the death of God as an *aporia* for post-war thinking. It is in Auschwitz that Nietzsche's prophetic utterance "God is dead" is dreadfully actualised under a disfiguring black cloud – a cloud which renders human suffering and indignity incommensurable with the silence of a loving God whose love remains unrevealed. "Did not Nietzsche's saying about the death of God take on, in the extermination camps, the meaning of a quasi-empirical fact?" the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas contemplates.⁵² One cannot know the full extent to which Levinas's experience of the concentration camp forged his thinking. "Have I the right to be when facing the other man's suffering? Such is the human question par excellence in Levinas's philosophy."⁵³ It is surely a question which takes on radical urgency in the face of this abyss which conceals the Face of God. But this mutilation of the human form in the extermination camps is mutually the defamation of all ideas of the *Übermensch* as well as of theodicy. For Levinas it is therefore the "face of the other" – as the stranger, the widow, the orphan – which awakens us from the introverted introspection of our metaphysical dreaming after the Face of God.

Metaphysics, Levinas identifies in *Totality and Infinity*, is *desire*. "The true life is absent [from Arthur Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell*, "*la vraie vie est absente*"]. But we are in the world. Metaphysics arises and is maintained in this alibi."⁵⁴ We are turned away from our world to the world which is "absent", "elsewhere", "otherwise".⁵⁵ Metaphysics has become characterised by the nostalgic longing to return: the dubious belief in this life as exile, as unreal, as unholy. But Levinas re-directs the metaphysical desire away from a melancholic yearning for full presence, and towards the *alterity* of the other who will always remain elusive. Metaphysical desire must not seek its consummation in the possession of an object; but rather, in desiring the perpetually elusive "absolutely other", desire "understands [*entend*] the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the other."⁵⁶ Levinas therefore implores that "metaphysical desire does not long to return, for it is a desire for a land not of our birth, for a land foreign to every nature, which has not been our fatherland and to which we shall never betake ourselves."⁵⁷

The God-relation for Levinas is likewise not to be understood from the perspective of the alienation of the Unhappy Consciousness. Humanity does not struggle with an inscrutable 'faceless' God since the divine is 'revealed' in 'the face of the other': "the infinite does not burn the eyes that are lifted up to him."⁵⁸ This God "is not numinous: the I who approaches him is neither annihilated on

⁵¹ 'The Gay Science: Book V, 343, *The Portable Nietzsche*, 448

⁵² 'Useless Suffering', *entre nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, 97

⁵³ Catherine Chaliel, 'The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and the Hebraic Tradition', ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas For Philosophy, Literature and Religion*, 6

⁵⁴ *Totality and Infinity*, 33

⁵⁵ *Totality and Infinity*, 33

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Totality and Infinity*, 33-34

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 77

contact nor transported outside of itself, but remains separated and keeps its as-for-me.”⁵⁹ The epiphany of this God is in the primacy of the human face. “It is God that I can define through human relations and not the inverse... when I say something about God, it is always beginning from human relations.”⁶⁰ Levinas still talks of God as “the Transcendent, infinitely other,” but our existence is essentially a “social relation”. Direct ‘face to face’ comprehension of the divine is impossible; but Levinas is not concerned with the Kierkegaardian fear and trembling of an impossible standing before the Wholly Other.⁶¹ God is not simply ‘wholly other’, but “other than the other [*autre qu’autrui*]”.⁶² The invisibility and transcendence of God ultimately renders “a God unimaginable, but a God accessible in justice.”⁶³ It is the face of the other which itself is “holy”: “his appeal to me, is his truth.”⁶⁴ The decisive call to us is not from ‘beyond’. “the primordial *expression*, is the first word: ‘you shall not commit murder’”.⁶⁵ God is not revealed in numinous theophanies; rather, “His very epiphany consists in soliciting us by his destitution in the face of the Stranger, the widow, and the orphan.”⁶⁶

And yet, as John Llewelyn wonders, “Having endorsed Nietzsche’s proclamation of the death of the God of ontotheology, why is Levinas either unable or unwilling to eliminate the word ‘God’

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ ‘Transcendence and Height’, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 29. Levinas’s terminology often appears quite fluid in this regard since, “He uses many words that traditionally were reserved for God to describe the human Other. Terms like ‘invisible,’ ‘absolute’ and ‘absolution,’ ‘epiphany,’ ‘revelation,’ ‘separation,’ ‘liturgy,’ ‘height,’ and ‘highness’ name the transcendent ‘character’ of *autrui* and his or her proximity to God.” Adriaan T. Peperzak, ‘Transcendence’, ed. Peperzak, *Ethics as First Philosophy*, 191

⁶¹ In discussion following Levinas’s presentation of ‘Transcendence et hauteur’ to *la Société Française de Philosophie* on January 27th 1962, Jean Wahl posed Levinas the question of the relation of his use of ‘wholly other’ to Kierkegaard’s ‘wholly other’: “You employed the expression ‘wholly Other.’ This naturally evokes the name of Kierkegaard, and perhaps others. And the ‘wholly Other’ for him is God. Is he wrong? Is the ‘wholly Other’ found in experience, or is it rather only in and through the call of God that the ‘wholly Other’ is revealed?” Levinas’ response was both emphatic and unsatisfying: “It is difficult to say. I agree that these notions are connected, but ultimately my point of departure is absolutely non theological. I insist upon this. It is not theology that I am doing, but philosophy.” ‘Transcendence and Height’, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 29-30. Levinas is not concerned with the face of God which ‘none may see and live’, and one suspects that this is what he disdains in reading Kierkegaard (see chapter 4). On the other hand, Westphal argues that Kierkegaard’s numinous God may have more to recommend than Levinas realises: “Kierkegaard gives us a moral transcription of God as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. God is *mysterium* by remaining hidden even within the piety of hidden inwardness, *tremendum* by commanding the subordination of self-love to neighbor love, and *fascinans* by being the forgiving love that gives us both our sense of worth and our capacity to love others. Levinas’s God is the *mysterium tremendum* [an ascription Levinas may have contested]; but there is the *fascinans* in the Good that gives no goods but only compels to goodness?” ‘Commanded Love and Divine Transcendence in Levinas and Kierkegaard’, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl, *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 217. See also Peter Kemp’s ‘Another Language for the Other: From Kierkegaard to Levinas’, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 23, No. 6, pp.5-28. Kemp concludes: “For the Jew Levinas, God remains the Judge of men and women; for the Christian Kierkegaard, God is in addition the Father who loves them.

The face of the Wholly Other is different in Kierkegaard and in Levinas.” (24)

⁶² “...other otherwise, other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other [*autrui*], prior to the ethical bond with the other [*autrui*] and different from every neighbor, transcendent to the point of absence, to the point of a possible confusion with the stirring of the *there is*.” ‘God and Philosophy’, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 141

⁶³ *Totality and Infinity*, 291

⁶⁴ *Totality and Infinity*, 291

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 199

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 78.

from the lexicon in which he expounds what he himself describes as a humanism of the other man?”⁶⁷ In *Totality and Infinity*, while Levinas may capitalise ‘Transcendence’ and ‘the Other’, Theo de Boer suggests that the idea of God is so sparse and unelaborated that one might believe that ‘man’ has effectively replaced ‘God’.⁶⁸ And yet, de Boer concludes that Levinas’ “is a philosophy of religion in the time of the suspicion of ideologies... It is an appropriate philosophy in the time of the death of God.”⁶⁹

In this time of the death of God, the time of its post-holocaust significance, is God best spoken of in terms of absence, or must all talk of God fall silent? Or else can one only legitimately speak in a human complaint to God which suggests, to use Susan Taubes’s words, “that man in his conscious moral anguish is superior to an amoral universe”?⁷⁰ As Albert Camus pronounces, “When man submits God to moral judgement, he kills Him in his own heart.”⁷¹ Yet for Moltmann, “The only way past protest atheism is through a theology of the cross which understands God as the suffering God in the suffering of Christ and which cries out with the godforsaken God, ‘My God, why have you forsaken me?’”⁷² Both theism and atheism, Moltmann points out, erroneously regard God and suffering as contradictory. The cross shatters that misconception. To this effect Moltmann makes crucial reference to one passage from Elie Weisel’s account of the Holocaust, *Night*:

The SS hanged two Jewish men and a youth in front of the whole camp.
The men died quickly, but the death throes of the youth lasted for half an hour.
‘Where is God? Where is He?’ someone asked behind me. As the youth still hung in torment in the noose after a long time, I heard the man call again, ‘Where is God now?’ And I heard a voice in myself answer: ‘Where is he? He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows...’⁷³

For Moltmann this is the definitive “Christian answer to the question of this torment. To speak here of a God who could not suffer would make God a demon. To speak here of an absolute God would make God an annihilating nothingness. To speak here of an indifferent God would condemn men to indifference.”⁷⁴

However, it seems as if Moltmann has read this account against Wiesel’s grain of intention.⁷⁵ God’s death on the gallows at Auschwitz surely attests more to an impotent despair than the salvific

⁶⁷ ‘Amen’, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, *Ethics as First Philosophy*, 200. However, Philip Blond argues that Levinas’s philosophy of ‘the Other’ – by dividing Being from God – devalues the world through the denial of God’s phenomenal presence. “Hence the Other leaves the phenomenal world very much as both modernity and atheism have described it.” ‘Emmanuel Levinas: God and Phenomenology’, *Post-Secular Philosophy*, 220.

⁶⁸ ‘Theology and the Philosophy of Religion according to Levinas’, *Ethics as First Philosophy*, 161

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 171

⁷⁰ ‘The Absent God’, ed. Thomas J. J. Altizer, *Toward A New Christianity: Readings in the Death of God Theology*, 115

⁷¹ *The Rebel*, 57

⁷² *The Crucified God*, 227

⁷³ Cited in *The Crucified God*, 273-274.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 274

⁷⁵ I am indebted to Murray Rae for first drawing my attention to this treatment in his paper, ‘When Darkness Covers the Earth: A Theological Consideration of Human Suffering’, given at the *Research Institute in Systematic Theology*, King’s College, London on 15th October 2002.

solidarity of human-divine suffering.⁷⁶ Surely by this crucifixion God also has become smoke in the furnaces of Auschwitz. And this vaporous abyss [*Abgrund*] fails to yield to infiltration, resembling instead an inscrutable [*unergründlich*] cloud of dreadful unknowing. “Just as readers committed suicide in the nineteenth century, writers did in ours”, Elie Wiesel bluntly announces, “They felt impotent. They realized that once you have penetrated the Kingdom of Night, you have reached the end.”⁷⁷ And yet the night is impenetrable; writers realise, with guilt and inadequacy, that they have essentially said nothing.⁷⁸ Hence, for Wiesel, “what is called the literature of the Holocaust does not exist, cannot exist. It is a contradiction in terms, as is the philosophy, the theology, the psychology of the Holocaust. Auschwitz negates all systems, opposes all doctrines.”⁷⁹ For poet Edmond Jabés also, the Holocaust is something in which language encounters its limit and its dismay. One may still speak of God in this desert of writing however, but ‘God’ has become another word for a confrontation with absence. As Jabés declares, “What I mean by God in my work is something we come up against, an abyss, a void, something against which we are powerless.”⁸⁰ This is an abyss which will not acquiesce to anatomisation. Even Moltmann concedes that “the experiences of Auschwitz and Hiroshima raise questions for which no answers are enduring, because the questions are fundamentally protests.”⁸¹ The asking of them is often as far as one can venture into this particular abyss, formed as it is from the absence of the answer.

Suffering Divinity

But there is one consolation, one line of thought that can perhaps be said to have been closed for us – and it is this lacuna which reveals the abyss. This closure is the desertion of metaphysics – ontotheology⁸² – both as the way of thinking about God and as a way of deriving meaning from

⁷⁶ Echoing Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza’s indictment of the use of the Holocaust as a “mere theological metaphor”, John T. Pawlikowski is anxious not to derive too much Christological meaning from the Holocaust. Pawlikowski astutely criticises Moltmann’s “Christology of divine vulnerability” since, whereas the cross was both voluntary and redemptive on the part of Christ, “The Holocaust was neither voluntary nor redemptive in any sense.” ‘Christology after the Holocaust’, *Theology Digest*, Volume 47, Number 1, Spring 2000, p.7. To employ the Holocaust as a signifier for a cosmological event, to mystify it with the significance of eternity, is to abstract it from some of its inherent absurdity. In Simone Weil’s words, “Human misery would be intolerable if it were not diluted in time. We have to prevent it from being diluted *in order that it should* be intolerable.” *Gravity and Grace*, 14

⁷⁷ Elie Wiesel, ‘Art and Culture after the Holocaust’, ed. Eva Fleischner, *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, 411

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 405

⁸⁰ In Paul Auster, ‘Book of the Dead: an Interview with Edmond Jabés’, ed. Eric Gould, *The Sin of the Book: Edmond Jabés*, 19

⁸¹ *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, 91

⁸² “The term ‘ontotheology’ was first used by Kant in reference to the metaphysical deduction of God’s existence with no appeal to experience. It has come into common parlance, however, through the work of Martin Heidegger, for whom the entire history of Western metaphysics, from Plato to Nietzsche, can be called ‘ontotheology’, the mark of which is an inability to think the conditions of its own possibility.” Mary-Jane Rubenstein, ‘Unknow Thyself: Apophaticism, Deconstruction, and Theology After Ontotheology’, *Modern Theology* 19:3 July 2003, 389. “In recent years, however, the word’s sense has been expanded by both Heidegger and Derrida so that it now includes the metaphysics Kant called into question and aspects of the critical philosophy itself.” Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 75

transcendence for the sufferings of immanence. Any 'God' who emerges after the Holocaust seems to reflect the need to shed his metaphysical skin. The metaphysical beyond is that which crumbles once "the gods have flown".⁸³ Once this structure has subsided, can one speak of a divinity which reveals itself more through suffering than metaphysical seclusion? 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' It is in this cry that, according to Carl Jung, Christ's "human nature attains divinity" since at this moment God "drinks to the dregs" the meaning of mortal suffering.⁸⁴ Traditionally such an idea was incommensurable – an offence Kierkegaard would say – as Porphyry, student of Plotinus, exemplifies: "How can we admit that the divine became an embryo, and that after its birth, it was wrapped up in swaddling clothes, covered with blood, bile, and even worse things?"⁸⁵

Recently, however, it appears that the scandal of divine immanence is required to rectify the scandal of divine *aseity*; the madness of the cross is supplanted by an inversion of that initial offence. This is epitomised by a comment from Simone Weil, "Suffering: superiority of man over God. The Incarnation was necessary so that this superiority should not be scandalous."⁸⁶ Even *Patirpassionism* – the suffering of the Father – is no longer deemed heretical, but a reconciliatory demand which the age places upon God. In this *pathos* of God, Moltmann writes, humanity "becomes the friend of God, feels sympathy with and for God."⁸⁷ Though, it must be conceded, it is not clear whether that sympathy can save us.

In further contrast to the traditional Aristotelian 'Unmoved Mover', Moltmann elsewhere proposes an understanding of the activity of creation in terms borrowed from the kabbalist Isaac Luria's doctrine of *tzimtzum* – literally 'a holding in of the breath' which Moltmann describes as "self limitation".⁸⁸ By *tzimtzum* it is God's withdrawal into Godself that frees the space for something other than God to come into existence (creation): "the *nihil* for his *creatio ex nihilo* only comes into being because – and in as far as – the omnipotent and omnipresent God withdraws his presence and restricts his power."⁸⁹ Through this act of withdrawal the otherness between Creator and creation is crucially conceived as an activity of *grace*, not transcendence or oppression. God's contraction creates space for something other than God to appear. "The Creator is not an 'unmoved mover' of the universe. On the contrary, creation is preceded by this self-movement on God's part, a movement which allows creation the space for its own being."⁹⁰ In this sense, God's withdrawal is a gracious act of becoming other, or of allowing the other to come into existence. *Alterity* is a corollary of divine creation. Otherness is founded in love, as Moltman explains in positively linking the divine self-limitation of kabbalistic *tzimtzum* to the self-humiliation of a kenotic Christology: "God's creative love is grounded in his humble, self-humiliating love. This self-restricting love is the beginning of that self-emptying of God

⁸³ This is John Peacocke's phrase. 'Heidegger and the Problem of Onto-Theology', 185

⁸⁴ *Answer to Job*, 74

⁸⁵ *Against the Christians*, frag. 77. Cited in Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus*, 23.

⁸⁶ *Gravity and Grace*, 72

⁸⁷ *The Crucified God*, 272

⁸⁸ *God in Creation*, 86. *Tzimtzum* "means concentration and contraction, and signifies a withdrawing of oneself into oneself. Luria was taking up the ancient Jewish doctrine of the Shekinah, according to which the infinite God can so contract his presence that he dwells in the temple. But Luria applied it to God and creation. The existence of a world outside God is made possible by an inversion of God."

Ibid., 87

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 86-87

which Philippians 2 sees as the divine mystery of the Messiah. Even in order to create heaven and earth, God emptied himself of his all-plenishing omnipotence, and as creator took upon himself the form of a servant.”⁹¹

Another recent participatory alternative to the ‘Unmoved Mover’ – though one which blurs the *alterity* of creator-creation – is apparent in the renowned ‘Process’ thought of Alfred North Whitehead. Dissolving traditional distinctions, Whitehead describes God immanent in the World and the World in God; God transcending the World and the World also transcending God. “It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God.”⁹² God is always evolving as the World evolves: “Neither God, nor the World, reaches static completion. Both are in the grip of the ultimate metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty. Either, of them, God and the World, is the instrument of novelty for the other.”⁹³ This reciprocity between heaven and earth depicts a divinity who “does not create the world, he saves it: or, more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness.”⁹⁴ This is God’s appearance as – and here one may think of Moltmann’s theology – as “the great companion – the fellow sufferer who understands.”⁹⁵

Here we are presented with tangible alternatives to the vision of the remote Creator, captured in his own transcendence, against whom Byron depicts Cain’s rebellion.

But let him
Sit on his vast and solitary throne,
Creating worlds, to make eternity
Less burthensome to his immense existence
And unparticipated solitude;
Let him crowd orb on orb: he is alone
Indefinite, indissoluble tyrant; Byron, *Cain: A Mystery*

And yet, whilst being arguably more responsive to the failure of theodicy, is such re-thinking indicative of Hans Schwarz’s observation that “to make sense of God today, it appears that we must, so to speak, clip his wings”?⁹⁶

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 87

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 88

⁹² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 410

⁹³ *ibid.*, 411

⁹⁴ *Process and Reality*, 408. However, suffering continues to threaten such a view since any evolutionary-oriented theories which establish process as the salvific principle must contend with the chaos and entropy which threaten to disrupt the process itself. As the geneticist and evolutionary theorist Theodosius Dobzhansky explains: “If particular evolutionary histories were all directed, extinction would be inexplicable. A direction which leads to extinction is misdirection.” (‘Teilhard de Chardin and the Orientation of Evolution: A Critical Essay’, ed. Ewert H. Cousins, *Process Theology: basic writings*, 238)

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 413. In Whitehead’s narrative, religion develops in human understanding through three stages: 1. God the enemy .2; God the void; and finally 3. God the companion. See Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 16

⁹⁶ ‘The Contemporary Relevance of Luther’s Insistence on the Otherness of God’, ed. Summerell, *The Otherness of God*, 86

Metamorphosis of God?

The snake that cannot shed its skin perishes.

Nietzsche, 'The Dawn', 573⁹⁷

"The period post mortem Dei," Paul Ramsey proposes, "divides into two distinct eras, roughly between the World Wars. Until that time, the death of God meant something *anti-Christian*; after it and until now [1961], the death of God means something entirely *post-Christian*."⁹⁸ To assert that the age is culturally post-Christian is to claim, as Vahanian does, that "Christianity has lost its relevance."⁹⁹ As such, modern non-religious man "will become himself only when he is totally demysticized", Mircea Eliade remarks, "He will not be truly free until he has killed the last god."¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, many have pointed and continue to point towards a return to God, or a return of God. However, a 'return' is a misleading suggestion if one accepts Eliade's diagnosis that, far from any severance occurring, a relationship of dependence continues to define "nonreligious man". Though resentment of a religious heritage has caused religious mythology and ceremony to become repressed, they continue to be manifest at the unconscious level "even in the most desacralized of modern societies."¹⁰¹ Ultimately, despite his deicide and iconoclasm, "this nonreligious man descends from *homo religiosus* and, whether he likes it or not, he is also the work of religious man... nonreligious man has been formed by opposing his predecessor, by attempting to 'empty' himself of all religion and all trans-human meaning... He cannot utterly abolish his past, since he is himself the product of his past."¹⁰² In light of this inability of nonreligious man to extract himself entirely from the side of *homo religiosus*, it would be more appropriate to call the recent tendency a *conscious* return, or a return to religious consciousness. There is a recently discernible intellectual disillusion with modernity's critique of religion – a disenchantment often related to *postmodern* suspicions of modernity itself. As John Caputo summarises this trend, "Religion has returned even among avant-garde intellectuals who have given it a new legitimacy by discrediting its discreditors, suspecting its suspects, doubting its doubters, unmasking its unmaskers."¹⁰³

Don Cupitt identifies the end of metaphysical theology as "God's second death."¹⁰⁴ Now, Cupitt urges, "We need to be converted from our compulsive mourning for the dead God to action inspired by the dead Christ."¹⁰⁵ The postmodern post-mortem of God continues to this day; only now, amongst all the talk of 'decomposition' and 'putrefaction' murmurs also emerge of 'resurrection', 'kenosis', or 'metamorphosis'. Still an opaque suspicion resurfaces that, in Heidegger's cryptic posthumous words, "Now only a God can save us."

⁹⁷ *The Portable Nietzsche*, 92

⁹⁸ Ramsey's Preface, xiii, to Gabriel Vahanian's, *The Death of God*

⁹⁹ Vahanian, *The Death of God*, 139

¹⁰⁰ *The Sacred and the Profane*, 203

¹⁰¹ Eliade, *Ibid.*, 204

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 203-204

¹⁰³ *On Religion*, 66

¹⁰⁴ *The Time Being*, 10

¹⁰⁵ *The Long-Legged Fly*, 159

The only possibility remaining to us is that in thinking and in poetry there can be prepared a readiness for the appearing of the God, or for the absence of the God in a decline: that we decline in face of the absent God.¹⁰⁶

In Macquarrie's eyes, while Heidegger's use of the word 'God' remains more hypothetical than Christian, the all too tangible anxiety of Cold War and nuclear escalation underwrites his tone of anthropological pessimism and salvific exigency.¹⁰⁷ Such post-war anxiety is not atypical and conceals, one suspects, an implicit desire to re-think God so that God can now re-think us. In the gloom of the *post-mortem dei*, some strive to become *salvatores dei*. Only a God can save us, as Heidegger has alluded; but perhaps, as Nikos Kazantzakis suggests, the God who would save us must first be saved by us: "He cannot be saved unless we save him with our own struggles; nor can we be saved unless he is saved."¹⁰⁸ This salvific urgency is intensified for Kazantzakis by the fact that this endangering of God is occurring in a time of definite crisis: "We are living in a critical, violent moment of history; an entire world is crashing down, another has not yet been born."¹⁰⁹

Kazantzakis's sentiments do not belong exclusively to him, but to the age in which shares. "Profound anxiety shakes the foundation of human being", Keiji Nishitani writes, "and the more foundational the supporting ground had been, the greater the void and the anxiety."¹¹⁰ And what greater supporting ground [*grund*] could there be but God? What more anxious abyss [*Afgrund*] than the loss of God? Still, despite this nihilism of meaning, and also in some recognition of it, there are those who seek a path across the abyss: a path clear of the thorns of melancholy. On the more radical front, 'death-of-God theologian' Thomas Altizer seeks to derive a twentieth century hope and Nietzschean joy from the kenotic death of God. Altizer, following Nietzsche, *proclaims* not only that 'God is dead' but that 'God must die' for humanity to surpass itself. Any position which looks back to the ashes of the divine crematoria and is paralysed, like Lot's wife, cannot acquit itself of a paralysing melancholy. It is the captivity of mourning that Altizer seeks to emancipate us from as we must come to "recognize our *Angst* as the 'smell' of God's decomposition. For to know an alien and empty nothingness as the dead body of God is to be liberated from every uncanny and awesome sense of the mystery and power of chaos."¹¹¹ The divine putrefaction denotes the decay of "Deified nothingness" from whose empty tomb the kenotic transmutation of Christ emerges. For this prophet of Christian atheism, the resurrection dawn conveys the 'good news' of God's "perpetual and forward-moving process of self-negation, pure negativity, or kenotic metamorphosis."¹¹² God negates his previous *aseity* and evacuates Heaven entirely by revealing his new name as Jesus Christ.¹¹³ Not only are we rescued from metaphysical nostalgia, but God, saved from His metaphysical incarceration undertakes his metamorphosis beyond

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger in interview with *Der Spiegel*, 1966 – though published only posthumously in 1976. Cited in Macquarrie, *Heidegger and Christianity*, 105

¹⁰⁷ Macquarrie, *Heidegger and Christianity*, 95. Also, as Richard Kearney states, "Heidegger is more interested in Being than in God; and the curious 'saving God' he invokes in his final days is probably more akin to the God of Apollo and the poets than to Yahweh or Jesus." *The God who May Be*, 99

¹⁰⁸ *The Saviors of God*, 105.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 113-114

¹¹⁰ *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, 4

¹¹¹ Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, 96

¹¹² *The Gospel of Christian Atheism.*, 84

the solitude of his previous transcendence. We are delivered from our anxiety and despair: the 'Unhappy Consciousness' has been our catharsis from the death of God.¹¹⁴ The mourning is over. Rejoice in this darkness because it is not numinous, it is the embodiment of Christ.¹¹⁵

But for many, such a sublimation of despair remains impossible. Though that does not prevent many from breaking the silence – albeit conceding a confession like Arthur A. Cohen's that "I have promised only to cross the abyss. I have not promised to explain it."¹¹⁶ Perhaps, humanly speaking, such a naming of the abyss is all that can be hoped for. After all, as Richard Rubenstein acknowledges, Christ is a resource of no avail to the Jew in responding to the 'death of God'.¹¹⁷ Unable to resort to the Christ who emerges for Moltmann as the cruciform figure at the heart of Auschwitz, Rubenstein halts at the abyss in silence before the "Holy Nothingness" (*das Heilige Nichts*). "*The infinite God is not a thing; the infinite God is no-thing.*"¹¹⁸ Yet "Holy Nothingness" does not equate to God's annihilation for Rubenstein; rather "God as the 'Nothing' is not absence of being, but a superfluity of being."¹¹⁹ But still the inscrutability of the abyss resounds in these formulations. God as *das Heilige Nichts* has something of the *tremendum* about it. Rubenstein admits that he still cannot reconcile himself to loving this abyssal God: "I cannot. I am aware of His holiness. I am struck with wonder and terror before His Nothingness, but I cannot love him. I am afrighted before Him. Perhaps, in the end, all I have is silence."¹²⁰ As such, unable to extract himself from the abyss, Rubenstein confesses that "Unlike Altizer, I cannot rejoice in the death of God. If I am a death-of-God theologian, it is with a cry of agony."¹²¹

Such wounded candour casts an exacting light upon more expectant variations upon the 'death of God'. "But if God dies, so must theology", Carl A. Raschke admonishes, "A 'death of God theology' is an always was, an oxymoron, a tasteless jape, a *tour de farce*. The revelation of the farce is writing; and theology must write itself into the grave."¹²² And so, for Raschke, it is Deconstruction – "the dance of death upon the tomb of God"¹²³ – which represents theology's inheritance from the 'death of God'. "Deconstruction shows that the logos of our latter-day '--ologies,' including theology, has been nought but a ritualistic and compulsive defense against *to kenon* ('the void')... Deconstruction, which must be considered the interior drive of twentieth-century theology rather than an alien agenda, is in the final analysis *the death of God put into writing*".¹²⁴ If it is true that the embrace of the 'death of God' represents an implicit resistance of the abyss then are we not consigned to a degree of intractable

¹¹³ *ibid.*, 86

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, 119

¹¹⁵ "...greet even this darkness as a yet more comprehensive embodiment and fulfilment of the original passion of Christ." *ibid.*, 110

¹¹⁶ *The Tremendum*, 108. Cited in Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Legacy of the Holocaust*, 334.

¹¹⁷ Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, 251

¹¹⁸ *After Auschwitz*, 298

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 264 (This is a recount of a conversation with a Polish Catholic Theologian.)

¹²¹ *After Auschwitz*, 264

¹²² 'The Deconstruction of God', ed. Altizer, Myers et al, *Deconstruction and Theology*, 27

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 28

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3

melancholy? “Deconstruction within theology writes the epitaph for the dead God”, Raschke asserts, “But the death of God is not necessarily a cause for celebration. Theologians who might appropriate Nietzsche’s ‘myth’ for their own vanity or personal aggrandizement are like children who have discovered some black and treacherous abracadabra.”¹²⁵

This indictment is stinging but nonetheless astute in pointing to a potentially disingenuous salve against melancholy and apparent God-forsakenness in theological appropriation of the ‘death of God’. However, it is not certain that theology discovers its terminus in the deconstruction of God. “Deconstruction is the flailing of the spades of God’s gravediggers”, Raschke pronounces – suggesting that Deconstruction is the culmination of the ‘death of God’ as well as the destiny of theology – “to refuse the ceremony of burial, however, is a more culpable form of hubris than to take the shovel in hand. For the stench of ‘divine decomposition,’ as Nietzsche phrased it, is everywhere.”¹²⁶ Many would indeed put their hands to the spade or rather lay a flower upon the gravestone. But the tomb of the God of the philosophers? Or the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? The name inscribed upon this tomb of the unknown God is increasingly opaque. After all, the divine name is, as I shall discuss below, one which cannot be captured in stone.

Even since Kierkegaard, theology has had to contend with an abundance of eras which claim to deform, transform and transfigure its task. While this is nothing new, the rapidity of these overlapping *aporias* means that, in Peter Berger’s words, “the theologian in our situation is haunted by a sense of vertigo.”¹²⁷ This is true in more than one sense of the word. These eras have rapidly succeeded one another, even overlapping in their eagerness to articulate fresh horizons: post-modernity, post-Christian, post-secular, ‘death of God’, ‘death of self’. All find their vitality, in one way or another, in the decay of Christianity and the apparent absence of God and, as such, perhaps reveal more about the perception of the self’s place, before God or otherwise, than the status of divine ontology itself. In the light of this modern vertigo, contemporary theology, Rubenstein suggests, “reveals less about God than it does about the kind of men we are.”¹²⁸ As such, can the theology of this time speak only of God through a perception of divine absence – that is, as a deep wound of metaphysical longing in the human subject? Has theology become, as Rubenstein asserts, “largely an anthropological discipline”?¹²⁹ And how can this be reconciled with our dependence upon a God who is Wholly Other?

Yet, lest one thinks that anthropology remains the stable orienting centre of the modern world, it must be understood that anthropology itself experiences its own vertiginous moments of crisis – the alleged ‘death of the self’ initiated by the ‘death of God’.¹³⁰ Bearing this in mind, is a contemporary

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 27

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 30

¹²⁷ *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*, 44

¹²⁸ Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism*, ‘Preface’,

xx

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ “Death seems to be contagious in postmodernism. The death of God reproduces itself as the death of man (both as the end of humanism and as the end of patriarchy). This death in turn becomes, not surprisingly, the death of the subject, and, surprisingly, the death of the author.” Merold Westphal, ‘Kierkegaard’s Climacus – a Kind of Postmodernist’, ed. Robert L. Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 64

theological anthropology continually haunted by a nostalgic inquiry after the absent God and the inner ghost of subjectivity? Or is the time more amenable than ever for a Kierkegaardian theological anthropology in which “Man himself is the place where God is”?¹³¹ Ultimately, I shall suggest that the vertigo and dissolution of the self is a vital moment in the divine revealing of the self’s condition in standing before God. This abyss [*Afgrund*] of selfhood is the un-grounding of the self that reaps the ground on which one stands in becoming a self before God.

Theology and Anthropology: a Chasmic Difference?

If the self is the question asked of oneself, can it be certain that all are essentially asking the same question? This question incorporates what might be named ‘the human condition’ – an avowedly vague and elusive notion. Theological anthropology faces the uncertain task of speaking about and to a modern humanity that stands, in Maurice Friedman’s fertile description, “between Job and Prometheus.”¹³² There is much in this comparison, not least the sense in which it encapsulates the western mind’s uneasy position between potentially incommensurable Hebraic and Greek conceptions of the relation between humanity and divinity. But in many ways this modern Promethean flame has become, in Kierkegaardian terms, “the cold fire in despair”¹³³: the impossible self-devouring “will to be oneself” which can neither consume the self, nor transmute the self into itself. The endless introspection of the self which strives to reflect itself into existence is “Like Prometheus stealing fire from the gods”, Anti- Climacus tells us, it steals from God the thought of its own being.¹³⁴

It was Ludwig Feuerbach – the Promethean ‘fire-river’ – who definitively claimed to redeem for modernity the thought of human existence from God. As Prometheus held the secret that was the undoing of Zeus, so Feuerbach unveils that “atheism... is the secret of religion itself.”¹³⁵ Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity* – which he aptly contemplated calling *Gnôthi Seauton* (‘Know thyself’) – sought to collapse the distinction between God and humanity (a distinction which in Kierkegaard is an “infinite qualitative difference”) by identifying that “The beginning, middle and end of religion is MAN.”¹³⁶ Feuerbach’s notorious assertion that “the true sense of Theology is Anthropology”¹³⁷ sanctified the ground for identifying God as merely a useful myth: a projection of human transcendence and aspiration which needed to be reclaimed from its unhappily self-imposed alienation in order to exalt anthropology into theology.

Arguably, however, anthropology’s emergence out from under the shadow of theology has an even more primitive origin. Perhaps it begins not with the modern Prometheus but with the Biblical anthropological dilemma of Job. After all, as Friedman suggests, “It is not theology but anthropology, not the metaphysical problem of evil but the problem of man, which is the real starting point of the

¹³¹ Valter Linström, ‘The Image of God’, ed. Niels Thulstrup and M. Mikulová Thulstrup, *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Volume 5: Theological Concepts in Kierkegaard*, 40

¹³² *Problematic Rebel: Melville, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Camus*, 4

¹³³ SUD, 18

¹³⁴ SUD, 68

¹³⁵ *The Essence of Christianity*, ‘Preface’, xvi

¹³⁶ *The Essence of Christianity*, 184

¹³⁷ *The Essence of Christianity*, ‘Preface’, xvii

Book of Job.”¹³⁸ In a sense, the Book of Job is the study of humanity in its perceived abandonment by God. Job’s meditation upon humanity comes, Friedman argues, not from the Psalmist’s sense of wonder, but under the rubric of despair.¹³⁹ He suggests that theology cannot reveal anthropology; that God is in no position to understand humanity. ‘Hast thou eyes of flesh? Or seest thou as man seest?’ (Job 10:4). It is almost with contempt, as Bruce Vawter claims, that Job addresses God as the “man watcher” – “in a parody of the concept of a God of providence.”¹⁴⁰ As such, Dermot Cox sees Job as personifying the fact that “ultimately man can only be ennobled by the capriciousness of God.”¹⁴¹ Cox even goes so far as to identify a Promethean dignity in Job’s despair: “Here indeed is Prometheus, but a more cerebral one than Aeschylus presents; chained to an intellectual rock of reason. And like Prometheus he hurls defiance at God”.¹⁴²

Yet, once Job has had his say, it is God who speaks the definitive last word. The Book of Job, although establishing the ‘problem of man’ as its starting point, concludes with a Theophany. While the ability to criticise God is, Cox believes, “the ultimate privilege of [human] autonomy”,¹⁴³ it is a judgement that must be assessed and tempered from the antithetical perspective. “There has to be one if the book is to be more than an existential cry in the dark.”¹⁴⁴ Anthropology is finally subsumed under theology. Ultimately, Job concedes God’s inscrutable sovereignty and confesses his own ignorance: ‘Therefore I have uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me which I knew not’ (42:3). Whereas for Feuerbach theology submits to the exaltation of anthropology, for Job anthropology repents itself back under the auspices of theology.

Although the Book of Job appears to speak as an incision into the God-forsaken despair of modernity, as Jung has testified, one should refrain from bestowing upon Job a modern sense of ‘self’. Feuerbach asserted that “Consciousness of God is self-consciousness, knowledge of God is self-knowledge.”¹⁴⁵ But in modernity, as Gabriel Vahanian diagnoses, “self-understanding is amputated from any necessity of a fundamental knowledge of God. It is easier to understand oneself without God than with God.”¹⁴⁶ Though this problem is suggested in Job’s despair, it is not an amputation that arises as the live possibility which it is for the modern subject, or even the *postmodern* subject – severed from God – suffering its own consequent dissolution.

“Postmodernism opens with the sense of *irrevocable* loss and *incurable* fault”, according to Mark C. Taylor, “This wound is inflicted by the overwhelming awareness of death – a death that ‘begins’ with the death of God and ‘ends’ with the death of our selves. We are in a time between times

¹³⁸ *Problematic Rebel*, 12. Dermot Cox, however, argues that it is the existence of God that actually radicalises the dilemma of human suffering: “suffering is not the problem; God is. Without a belief in a personal God human suffering is simply a part of life, concomitant to the human condition.” *Man’s Anger and God’s Silence: The Book of Job*, 11.

¹³⁹ Friedman, *Problematic Rebel*, 12. ‘What is man that thou should magnify him?’ Job 7:17; ‘What is man that thou art mindful of him?’ Psalm 8:4

¹⁴⁰ *Job and Jonah: Questioning the Hidden God*, 55

¹⁴¹ *Man’s Anger and God’s Silence*, 89

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 66

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 97

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 95

¹⁴⁵ *The Essence of Christianity*, 12

¹⁴⁶ *The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era*, 147

and a place which is no place.”¹⁴⁷ This time and place is delineated by an emphatic narrative of death. However, the ‘death of God’ and the ‘death of self’, which often form an implicit backdrop to postmodern thought, actually seem to rely upon the sort of characteristically modern narrative which postmodernism seeks to deny or disclaim. This claim requires unravelling.

The term *modern*, according to Jean-François Lyotard, designates “any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse... making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative”.¹⁴⁸ According to Lyotard, the initial traits of modernity are identifiable as early as Paul and Augustine – whose introduction of ‘eschatology’ into a classical pagan tradition (which had functioned in terms of myth and then ‘telos’) founded the world upon a narrative which underwrites existence from ‘beyond’.¹⁴⁹ In these terms, modernity could be diagnosed by the presence of a metaphysical explanation for life.

For Lyotard even the secularised narratives of the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Marxism, or speculative dialectics, “deploy the same historicity as Christianity, because they conserve the eschatological principle.”¹⁵⁰ Yet it seems one must regress further than Christianity for the genealogy of this impulse. In modern grand narrative, “An immemorial past is always what turns out to be promised by way of an ultimate end. It is essential for the modern to project its legitimacy forward while founding it in a lost origin.”¹⁵¹ As such, is Nietzsche not right that Plato, with his nostalgia for the ‘real world’, is the arch-protagonist of metaphysical restoration? Is not Hegel, with his narrative of history as the genealogy of *Geist*, the definitive modern protagonist of recovery from alienation? Ultimately, Lyotard writes, “Eschatology calls for an archaeology.”¹⁵² The aspiration of the future lies in the past. “Eschatology”, Lyotard writes, “recounts the experience of a subject affected by a lack, and prophesies that this experience will finish at the end of time with the remission of evil, the destruction of death, and the return to the Father’s house, that is, to the full signifier.”¹⁵³

It should be noted that there is nothing incredulous about ‘narrative’ in itself from Lyotard’s postmodern position. Such narratives exist in abundance. Essentially, the multiplicity and variety of narratives which refuse to structure themselves is essential to the fluid complexion of postmodernity. “Today, life is fast”, writes Lyotard, “It vaporises morals. Futility suits the postmodern, for words as well as things.”¹⁵⁴ But this does not prevent fables from being told – although the narratives of postmodernity do not submit all thought to a totalising eschatological/archaeological structure. But surely any thought which proclaims the ‘death of God’, ‘the death of self’, ‘the collapse of metaphysics’ or ‘the end of philosophy’ risks subsuming all under just such a grand narrative structure. When thought claims that certain ideas have lost credibility and dispenses with them in the name of progress does it not submit the future to its own eschatology? For example, when Mark C. Taylor

¹⁴⁷ *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology*, 6

¹⁴⁸ “...such as the dialectics of Spirit [Hegel], the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth.” *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Introduction, xxiii

¹⁴⁹ Lyotard, ‘A Postmodern Fable’, *Postmodern Fables*, 96

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 97

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 97-98

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 98

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 96

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Preface, vii

asserts that "The disappearance of the transcendental signified closes the theological age of the sign and makes possible the free play of a/theological writing... The death of God, however, is the birth of the divine that is not only itself but is always at the same time other",¹⁵⁵ is not the announcement of closure, death, and new birth not the language of irrevocable grand narrative?¹⁵⁶ Even if the alleged 'death of God' and 'death of self' emancipates thinking for the possibility of uniqueness, openness, *différance* etc., it does so under a particular governing grand narrative which declares that certain ways of thinking have come to an end. In other words, even if such thought declares "Now, outdate me!"¹⁵⁷ it proclaims deliverance from a prohibitive ground of finality and a pressure for progression. As such, it stands like a flaming sword in the path of retrospect and nostalgia and declares that one is free to move anywhere just so long as it is forward from that which has succumbed to "irrevocable" and "incurable" 'end' or 'death'. To look back is to become a paralysed pillar of salt: a melancholy relic of an archaic structure of thinking.

With the postmodern erasure of the self we encounter a grand narrative which paradoxically proclaims the end of all grand narrative: a history of the self encompassing its own annihilation. Similarly, what Altizer calls the death of God "incarnate in modern consciousness"¹⁵⁸ implies a history of God which exists primarily within a narrative of human thought. "But", Westphal rightly warns, "it would be dogmatic to assume that whatever is not available to us is simply not there. It would be to suppose that our present understanding is the touchstone of reality, an assumption – let us put this gently – more nearly Hegelian than postmodern."¹⁵⁹ This is the greatest danger: that God is submitted to a narrative determined by God's credibility to human thought. "Simplifying to the extreme," writes Lyotard, "I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives."¹⁶⁰ If Lyotard's simplified definition is accepted then must it be suggested that much apparently 'postmodern' talk of God actually depends upon the grand narrative of bringing a certain theological tradition to its end? Although this may be the grand narrative that brings a particular meta-narrative to an end, it still asserts an end and a beginning for thinking about God and may therefore be more appropriately designated modern than postmodern.

If modernity, Marion suggests, is understood as the completion and termination of metaphysics, "then, 'postmodernity' begins when, among other things, the metaphysical determination of God is called into question."¹⁶¹ Yet surely this questioning of the metaphysical determination of God

¹⁵⁵ *Erring*, 106

¹⁵⁶ Nancey Murphy and James Wm. McClendon, Jr. also argue that Mark C. Taylor's thought, in its *atomization* of the individual, actually reveals him to be more "arch-modern" than postmodern. "Thus despite its name Taylor's work represents not the beginning of a new era in theology, but rather the last racking gasps of modern-style thought." 'Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies', *Modern Theology* 5:3 April 1989, 212

¹⁵⁷ Don Cupitt, *The Time Being*, 182

¹⁵⁸ Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, 80

¹⁵⁹ 'Kierkegaard's Climacus – a Kind of Postmodernist', 63

¹⁶⁰ *The Postmodern Condition*, Introduction, xxiv

¹⁶¹ *God Without Being*, Preface to the English Edition, xx-xxi. "Nevertheless", as Francis Schüssler Fiorenza states, "metaphysics in itself cannot be the dividing line between postmodernity and modernity. One of the hallmarks of modernity is the very critique of traditional ontology and metaphysics. When postmodern theologians accept the critique of metaphysics as integral to postmodernity, they need to examine the critique of metaphysics as it emerged within modernity and

imposes the grand narrative which brings metaphysics to an end. In order to open oneself to the fresh possibilities of God, one must establish oneself in the 'death of God'. Although this grand narrative may be anti-metaphysical, it still seems to formulate itself firmly in *modernity* in order to proceed into postmodernity.¹⁶² Could it not be more postmodern to refuse the certitude of the death of God and regard this lacuna as a space for openness to the divine?

I am not asserting that postmodernism is always the unconfessed illusion of disguised modernity. Postmodern thought clearly exists under the parameters by which "One sets out to answer a modern problem but ends by calling into question the framework that made the question important."¹⁶³ But I am suspicious of postmodern claims to have irrevocably out-manoeuvred modernity; in one sense the paradox is that as soon as postmodernity claims to have *irrevocably* closed the door on modernity it instates itself into a modern grand narrative (though perhaps this is one inevitable concession). Postmodern, in Lyotard's definition, "signifies how writing, in the broadest sense of thought and action, is situated after it has succumbed to the contagion of modernity and has tried to cure itself of it."¹⁶⁴ It is this sense of immunisation against the malaise of modernity that is most relevant to this thesis. Postmodernism must be able to co-exist with modernity; otherwise it becomes a grand narrative proclamation of the end of modernity.¹⁶⁵

Again in Westphal's words, "To expose the futility and danger of putting God to work on philosophy's terms is one thing; to show that there is no God whose work is our highest task is quite another... so much contemporary postmodernism bandies the term 'onto-theo-ology' about as if it signified a successful attempt to make the world safe for atheism, to separate the question of freedom from the questions of God and immortality, and to free time completely from eternity."¹⁶⁶ The essentially ontological claims of post-ontotheology about the existence or reality of God seem to me to risk a relapse into modernism.¹⁶⁷ The iconoclasm of ontotheology is a useful corrective against the *causa sui* 'God of the philosophers'. It exposes how, as Alasdair MacIntyre surmises, "the God in whom the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came to disbelieve had been invented only in the

explore its import and consequences." 'Being, Subjectivity, Otherness: The Idols of God', ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon, *Questioning God*, 343.

¹⁶² However, Mark C. Taylor claims, "There is an alternative postmodernism, a postmodernism that is not an extension of modernism but instead one that calls into question the very foundation of modernism and its extension in modernist postmodernism. This version of postmodernism is often labelled poststructuralism or deconstruction." 'Postmodern Times', ed. Summerell, *The Otherness of God*, 184

¹⁶³ Murphy and McClendon, 'Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies', 199

¹⁶⁴ *Postmodern Fables*, 96

¹⁶⁵ Graham Ward differentiates 'postmodernism' – as a critical response to modernism – from 'postmodernity' – a "sociohistorical and economic period" in which "the incredulity toward metanarratives becomes a pervasive cultural skepticism" and "the worldview of modernity no longer becomes believable... I emphasize this because I understand postmodernism as always with us, whereas there are indications which suggest 'postmodernity' as a particular cultural emphasis is over." 'Introduction, or, A Guide to Theological Thinking in Cyberspace', ed. Graham Ward, *The Postmodern God*, xxv

¹⁶⁶ 'Kierkegaard's Climacus – a Kind of Postmodernist', 63

¹⁶⁷ Graham Ward also observes that for Lyotard himself "to see the modern being superseded by the postmodern would itself be a modern conception, allied as it is to notions of linear development and the new." 'Introduction, or, A Guide to Theological Thinking in Cyberspace', *The Postmodern God*, xxv

seventeenth century.”¹⁶⁸ But this is not to say that post-ontotheological thought only represents philosophy undoing its intrusion upon theology. There are far more expansive reasons and implications for doubting the metaphysical understanding of God, and this returns us to the Holocaust. Is not the Holocaust, in the implicit absurdity it renders of historical and divine meta-narrative, the most violent and involuntary announcement of the postmodern *aporia* in the last century?¹⁶⁹ “Through the Holocaust, history has lost its meaning. This cannot be said of any evil deed.”¹⁷⁰ And it is an apparent meaninglessness which cannot be taken as solid ground. Hence, I prefer the anthropocentrism of Rubenstein’s reluctance to formulate an ontological assertion around his most honest confession – a confession which directs the subject towards an inner abyss:

*I believe that radical theology errs in its assertion that God is dead. Such an assertion exceeds human knowledge... It is more precise to assert that we live in the time of the death of God than to declare ‘God is dead.’ The death of God is a cultural fact. We shall never know whether it is more than that.*¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ ‘The Debate about God: Victorian Relevance and Contemporary Irrelevance’, Alasdair MacIntyre and Paul Ricoeur, *The Religious Significance of Atheism*, 14

¹⁶⁹ As with the modern, the dating and genealogy of the postmodern is varied and problematic. Graham Ward outlines some of the proposed inception dates, though he acknowledges that “All of these dates relate to cultural expressions independent of a theological conception of the created orders.”

‘Introduction, or, A Guide to Theological Thinking in Cyberspace’, *The Postmodern God*, xxiii. Ward himself perceives that, where theological discourse is concerned, “the project of postmodernism” is announced with the overthrow of metaphysics and ontotheology “which is also the overthrow of secularity”. (xxiv) For my part, I am not intending to argue that the Holocaust represents the theological announcement of postmodernism, but rather that, in reflecting in the Holocaust’s aftermath, the *aporia* about metaphysics, upon which much postmodernism builds, must penetrate incisively and acutely beyond the postmodern conscience and into the conscience of the entirety of theological reflection.

¹⁷⁰ Gregory Baum, *Christian Theology After Auschwitz*, 16

¹⁷¹ *After Auschwitz*, 250

Chapter One: The Inner Abyss

Kierkegaard and the Self-Fascination of Modernity

[D]espair has inflamed something that cannot burn or be burned in the self.¹⁷²

Kierkegaard, as a distinctively modern thinker, extols the virtues of the project of selfhood; yet, in also operating as a virile critique of modernity, Kierkegaard's works transcribe the failure of the modern self. This should be taken in response to what David Gouwens identifies as the common erroneous tendency by which "Kierkegaard is charged with being the primary creator of a modern myth of the self as the 'solitary individual', unmoored from history or tradition, a permutation of the Cartesian ego or the self-creating individual Romanticism, a myth that many see in need of radical deconstruction."¹⁷³ In fact, Kierkegaard exacts his own method for deconstructing the very self he is indicted with endorsing. A more sensitive reading clearly discloses that Kierkegaard's corpus, in Harvie Ferguson's apposite words, essentially "dramatizes the decomposition of the modern self."¹⁷⁴ There is such anxiety in Kierkegaard's "genesis of the self", George Pattison writes, that "the origin of the self and its fall virtually coincide."¹⁷⁵ If Kierkegaard's anatomy of the self can, on the other hand, be called nihilistic rather than Cartesian then it is only in the sense that it seeks to "demolish the ground which has become false, turning the being of the self into a question mark" – to borrow Nishitani Keiji's words.¹⁷⁶ "To disclose the nihility at the ground of the self is to live in sincerity, and within such sincerity the self becomes truly itself."¹⁷⁷ But Kierkegaard's dialectic of selfhood also proposes an answer to the question mark of the self. Beyond the mere dramatisation of this degeneration, Kierkegaard's writings may tempt the reader towards undergoing what Johannes Climacus succinctly calls "the *autopsy* of faith."¹⁷⁸ It is in this dissection by faith that the self is able to see itself [Greek: *autos* – self; *optos* – seen] – though it must see itself initially through the anatomy of its own disintegration.

Hence, it would not be wholly inappropriate to designate a Kierkegaardian anatomy of selfhood as – at least initially – characteristically negative, *apophatic*, or even deconstructive. Kierkegaard, as N. H. S   observes, "has no anthropology that may be taught by him and adopted by his disciples."¹⁷⁹ That is because the person for Kierkegaard is not considered conceptually, but as existing through choice, subjectivity, freedom, inwardness. It is this focus upon the lived experience of selfhood which causes Kierkegaard to contemplate the very real experience of the disruption of the self as his anthropological starting point. This dissolution of the reflective self represents its deconstructed inauthenticity. *Authentically*, the self can only finally come to see itself through the eyes of an other. This failure and putrefaction of the self – described as a burrowing fire of despair – sanctifies the refining ground for the self to become itself *before God* in the movement of faith. Authentic

¹⁷² SUD, 19

¹⁷³ *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, 10

¹⁷⁴ *The Science of Pleasure: Cosmos and Psyche in the Bourgeois World View*, 209

¹⁷⁵ *Agnosis: Theology in the Void*, 54

¹⁷⁶ *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, 7

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ PF, 70

consciousness of self is inextricable from one's consciousness of God. And yet consciousness of God involves a consciousness of our infinite qualitative difference (sin) from the very God one is called to stand before. As such, this severance ensures that theology and anthropology, though entering ultimately indissoluble union, cannot undergo a Feuerbachian identity crisis. As Valter Lindström claims, "Kierkegaard's was both a 'theological anthropology' and an 'anthropological theology'. But he has performed this enterprise without losing the distance between the divine and the human and without losing the polarity between the divine ego and the human thou."¹⁸⁰

The 'self' is the isolating principle. When I am entangled in the world of 'objects' and 'others' the grasp upon my self is loosened. Anti-Climacus describes this as the inauthenticity of 'the crowd':

Surrounded by hordes of men, absorbed in all sorts of secular matters, more and more shrewd about the ways of the world – such a person forgets himself, forgets his name divinely understood, does not dare to believe in himself, finds it too hazardous to be himself and far easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, a mass man.¹⁸¹

As such, the 'self' often begins its search for itself in solitude. Descartes himself began his meditation in solitude – and it is, after all, Descartes who is frequently admonished as the one who "gave man, the subject, an ontological warrant for his nascent obsession with himself."¹⁸² It is in the Cartesian ego that, Paul Tillich alleges, "Man becomes pure consciousness, a naked epistemological subject; the world (including man's psychosomatic being) becomes an object of scientific inquiry and technical management."¹⁸³ Solitude was also Montaigne's impulse; but, as Charles Taylor explains, "when he sat down to write and turned to himself, he experienced a terrifying inner instability."¹⁸⁴ Ultimately the 'self' is mystified as it grasps after itself through entering into its own labyrinth of introspection. It is in the loneliness of reflection that I am most conscious of the elusive hiddenness of my self. As Albert Camus confesses, "For ever I shall be a mystery to myself."¹⁸⁵ As I struggle to take hold of my self, "it is nothing but water slipping through my fingers".¹⁸⁶ This is reminiscent of David Hume's asserted dissatisfaction with the elusiveness of this alleged 'self': "When I turn my reflection on *myself*, I never can perceive this *self* without some one or more perceptions; nor can I ever perceive any thing but the perceptions. 'Tis the composition of these, therefore, which forms the self."¹⁸⁷ Hume, however, was never entirely content in this resolution.¹⁸⁸

Nevertheless, obsessive and ineffectual introspection engendered a gathering cloud of modern suspicion regarding the integrity of the 'self'. Unlike the soul which had been ontologically and

¹⁷⁹ 'Anthropology', ed. Niels Thulstrup and M. Mikulová Thulstrup, *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Volume 7: Kierkegaard and Human Values*, 28

¹⁸⁰ 'The Image of God', ed. Niels Thulstrup and M. Mikulová Thulstrup, *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Volume 5: Theological Concepts in Kierkegaard*, 41

¹⁸¹ *SUD*, 33-34

¹⁸² Carl A. Raschke, 'The Deconstruction of God', 20

¹⁸³ *The Courage To Be*, 131

¹⁸⁴ *Sources of the Self*, 178

¹⁸⁵ *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 24

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ 'Appendix', *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 634

¹⁸⁸ "For my part, I must plead the privilege of a sceptic, and confess that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding." *Ibid.*, 636

religiously assured; the 'self' seems only to exist as it is perceived. Furthermore, it appears that the 'self' is ultimately the privileged reserve of the reflective, aristocratic and luxurious master – whilst any mere slave can be in possession of an immortal soul. Kierkegaard's works, on the other hand, assert the presence of eternity in the self and in doing so implore that *each individual*, equal before God, learns to become a self through obligation to the eternal. By doing so, Kierkegaard indicted the delusions of self-mastery inherent in reflective introspection in deference to the self conceived as the struggle for every human being before God. Every human being is allied under "the sickness unto death" (despair) and in consequent need of salvation from this universal dis-ease of selfhood. In this sense, Anti-Climacus scrutinised the phenomena of despair, and discerned in it something reminiscent of the Socratic proof for the immortality of the soul:

Socrates demonstrated the immortality of the soul from the fact that sickness of the soul (sin) does not consume it as sickness of the body consumes the body. Thus, the eternal in a person can be demonstrated by the fact that despair cannot consume his self... If there were nothing eternal in a man, he could not despair at all; if despair could consume his self, then there would be no despair at all.¹⁸⁹

A "cold fire" of despair enters the self and, by its "impotent self-consuming", affirms the indestructible presence of the eternal.¹⁹⁰ The torture of the self's inability to be itself and the impossibility in knowing itself paradoxically asserts the inviolable reality of the self. Yet its reality is felt as despair: "the sickness unto death, this tormenting contradiction, this sickness of the self, perpetually to be dying, to die and yet not die, to die death."¹⁹¹ The fact that the self – sick unto death – is unable to realise its own death testifies to the tormenting eternity of the self. But, insofar as the self does not authentically will to become itself, despair is experienced as a kind of enduring internal hell-fire: despair cannot "consume the eternal, the self at the root of despair, whose worm does not die and whose fire is not quenched [Mark 9:48]."¹⁹²

Here the self is victim to an omnivorous despair whose fire cannot devour the soul. Though a person despairing in this sickness unto death longs to be rid of the self, longs to die, "wants to tear his self away from the power that established it",¹⁹³ such self-slaughter is not possible. All despair is, at root, "in despair to will to be rid of oneself".¹⁹⁴ But this is a revolt against eternity, and against oneself, which eternity will not allow. Even if one wishes to evade despair by refusing to become conscious of it, refusing to become conscious of the self, then eternity will reveal one's despair to oneself and "nail him to himself" so that he cannot escape himself.¹⁹⁵ This is indeed an evocative image for the self which in despair is crucified to itself. The self bears the invisible wound of this stigmata. Melancholy, anxiety and despair are the invisible and secret agitation of the self's distress at its failure to possess itself. By struggling to become a self, one experiences the opposition of the eternal which wishes one to become oneself, what might be called the anxious 'over-againstness' (*Anfægtelse*) of eternity's claim

¹⁸⁹ SUD, 20-21. Re. Plato, *Republic*, X, 609d: "Do injustice and other forms of evil by their persistent presence in it [the soul] destroy and weaken it, till they finally kill it and sever it from the body?"

¹⁹⁰ SUD, 18

¹⁹¹ SUD, 18

¹⁹² SUD, 18

¹⁹³ SUD, 20

¹⁹⁴ SUD, 20

upon the self. This despair is eternity's obligation upon the self: it is also the birth-pain of the metamorphosis of spirit. And yet, "Eternity is obliged to do this, because to have a self, to be a self, is the greatest concession, an infinite concession, given to man, but it is also eternity's claim upon him."¹⁹⁶

Repentance is ultimately the path towards the alleviation of despair. "Despair Is Sin", and therefore as eternity reveals despair to oneself so one "has to learn what sin is by a revelation from God".¹⁹⁷ It is penitence alone that quenches the flames of despair. As Kierkegaard writes, "Sin in a man is like the Greek fire which is not extinguished with water – but in this case only with tears."¹⁹⁸ But talk of this metamorphosis would be premature. Anti-Climacus's assertion that "next to God there is nothing as eternal as a self"¹⁹⁹ currently finds diminished sympathy in light of the deconstruction of the myth of modern selfhood. However, the Kierkegaardian anatomisation of the disintegration of the self in despair, prior to its reconstruction before God, appears more attuned to the recent climate of the death of the self.²⁰⁰ As such, one must first examine the genealogy of the disintegrating modern 'self'.

A Genealogy of the Self: From 'Know Thyself' to the 'Death of the Self'

Paganism required: Know yourself. Christianity declares: No, that is provisional – know yourself – and look at yourself in the mirror of the Word in order to know yourself properly. No true self knowledge without God knowledge or before God. To stand before the mirror means to stand before God.²⁰¹

Rather than being a primal authentic truth, "Man" is, as Michel Foucault famously identifies, "only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old... and he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form."²⁰² Despite the canonical Socratic charge to 'Know Thyself', it is considered naïve by Foucault to attribute the anthropological investigation with such a primitive history. Even Kierkegaard is to some extent apparently culpable of the belief that Socrates originated the notion of selfhood. "The expression 'know thyself' means: separate yourself from 'the other'. Inasmuch as prior to Socrates this self did not exist."²⁰³ However, this allegedly Socratic self is specifically the sense of introspective 'self' known in isolated differentiation from 'the other'. Socrates, as Kierkegaard saw him, "isolated" and "abandoned" the individual of his time with his dialectical

¹⁹⁵ SUD, 21

¹⁹⁶ SUD, 21

¹⁹⁷ SUD, 95. I am therefore reading Part One and Part Two of *The Sickness Unto Death* as coherent with one another, though this is a matter of some debate. See Arne Grøn, 'The Relation Between Part One and Part Two of *The Sickness Unto Death*', ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1997*, pp. 35-50. See also Kristen K. Deede, 'The infinite qualitative difference: Sin, the self, and revelation in the thought of Søren Kierkegaard', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Volume 53, No. 1, February 2003, pp.25-48

¹⁹⁸ JP 4:4008 / Pap. VI A 30. The "Greek fire" refers to a material, used by the ancient Greek navy, which was combustible underwater (JP 4, p. 660 n.306).

¹⁹⁹ SUD, 53

²⁰⁰ "Indeed, *The Sickness Unto Death*, as well as the entire earlier pseudonymous literature of Kierkegaard, can be seen as an 'anatomy' of self-deception, as an escape from the self, a denial of the self." Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, 38

²⁰¹ JP 4:3902 / Pap. X4 A 412

²⁰² *The Order of Things*, Preface xxiii

²⁰³ CI, 203

method.²⁰⁴ And yet it is *modernity* that translates the Delphic oracle's recommendation for self-knowledge into inwardness and agency.²⁰⁵ It is essentially in modernity that the solipsistic 'self' has come into its own: hence Kierkegaard's observation that it was "nevertheless reserved for a later age to immerse itself in this self-knowledge".²⁰⁶

Plato wrote of the "absurd phrase" of self-mastery in reference to the ordering of the higher and lower parts of the soul²⁰⁷ – a centring which Charles Taylor describes as a precondition for interiorisation. However, while it was necessary to its development, Platonic centring is not identifiable with modern interiorisation: "it took a further step to bring it about."²⁰⁸ In modernity 'Know Thyself' becomes a task of solitary self-reflection. "In the Socratic view," writes Johannes Climacus, "every human being is himself the midpoint, and the whole world focuses only on him because his self-knowledge is God-knowledge."²⁰⁹ Anthropology and theology are so aligned in Socratic thought that, according to David Willows, it concludes itself with the "conviction that the epistemologist is divine."²¹⁰ Crucially, the 'self' as a distinct object amenable to scrutiny emerges with the evolution of anthropology from theology. The 'self' had been conceived as an object for God – now in modernity it becomes an object for itself. The 'self' is both subject and object: an absurd tension which, as Plato had already suggested, it is eventually unable to sustain.

However, prior to the modern severance of anthropology and theology, it was, according to Charles Taylor, "Augustine who introduced the inwardness of radical reflexivity and bequeathed it to the Western tradition of thought."²¹¹ Indeed, Mark C. Taylor identifies that, while murmurs of Western subjectivity can be detected in Paul, the now obsolete "epoch of selfhood" was effectively inaugurated by Augustine's *Confessions* and collapses upon Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.²¹² However, Richard Sorabji disputes Charles Taylor's notion that "we have to wait for Augustine to find the idea of an inner self where God resides".²¹³ Sorabji highlights Augustine's avowed debt to Neo-Platonism. The impulse towards inward discovery of God, Sorabji argues, echoes Plotinus as well as Paul. This can be seen in Plotinus's autobiographical account of the journey inward in which he recalls how "I become at one with the Divine, and I establish myself in it."²¹⁴

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ "The Greeks were notoriously capable of formulating the injunction 'gnōthi seauton' – 'know thyself' – but they didn't normally speak of the human agent as 'ho autos', or use the term in a context which we would translate with the indefinite article." Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 113

²⁰⁶ CI, 203. David Willows: "the Spirit of Socrates, with all its quest for divine knowledge via introspection, hovers over much of modernity with relentless optimism about the capacity of the human mind." *Divine Knowledge*, 34

²⁰⁷ "But 'master of oneself' is an absurd phrase. For if you're master of yourself you're presumably also subject to yourself, and so both master and subject. For there is only one person throughout." *The Republic* 430 E

²⁰⁸ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 120

²⁰⁹ PF, 11

²¹⁰ *Divine Knowledge*, 5

²¹¹ *Sources of the Self*, 131

²¹² *Erring*, 35

²¹³ *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*, 252

²¹⁴ See *Enneads* IV 8, 1, 1-11. St. Ambrose, in his sermon 'On Isaac or the Soul' compares this experience of Plotinus to Paul's ecstatic experience of 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. See Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision*, 25 n.5

And yet Augustine postulated a decisive distance, or estrangement, between God and the soul – a distance not simply derived from embodiment but from debilitating *concupiscence*: the doctrine of sin. “The soul is present to itself,” Charles Taylor explains, “and yet it can utterly fail to know itself”.²¹⁵ But perhaps the more decisive difference in terms of Augustinian and Plotinian selfhood is not the melancholy frustration of introspection, but the very form of the self’s narrative. While *Enneads* IV 8, 1, 1-11 represents the only truly autobiographical account in Plotinus, what is a rarity for Plotinus becomes an entire narrative structure in Augustine’s *Confessions*. By arguably inventing the literary form of the autobiography, Augustine indulges in a narrative that, in Denys Turner’s words, “at once *tells* of a self and *constructs* the self it tells of.... We might say, ‘no self, no autobiography’ ... we might also say, and for the same reason, ‘no autobiography, no self.’”²¹⁶ In other words, the self cannot be abstracted from the activity of its own narration: “this continuous ‘I’ who writes the autobiography is also constructed by the autobiography it writes.”²¹⁷ Hence, one might say that it is in confessional narrative transcription that the self attempts to become the object of its own self-reflection.²¹⁸ The self becomes articulated in terms of the narrative of its journey to God and to itself – a journey which reconciles its goals in one final destination.²¹⁹

In Augustine we read the narrative not only of inward self-seeking, but also of the realisation of its potential for failure through self-enclosure and its subsequent breaking open in relation to God.²²⁰ Salvation and selfhood are intertwined, as Lyotard writes in his posthumous work on Augustine, “Augustine confesses his God and confesses himself not because he is converted: he becomes converted or tries to become converted while making confession.”²²¹ It is apparently only when the ‘self’ becomes too sure of itself that it experiences its most fatal crisis. Descartes, despite his professed epistemological dependence upon God, ultimately constructs an autonomous ego dependent upon nothing but its own introspection. In contrast to Augustinian dependence, Charles Taylor explains, “for

²¹⁵ *Sources of the Self*, 134

²¹⁶ *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, 56

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 61

²¹⁸ Judith Perkins suggests that “The triumph of Christianity was, in part at least, a triumph of a particular representation of the self.” *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era*, 11. Perkins importantly highlights how, rather than engendering purified detachment, early narrative forms contributed in places to a turn away from Stoicism and ‘self-mastery’ and towards a suffering embodied self: “Narratives issuing from different cultural points – medicine, Christian martyr literature – brought into cultural consciousness a representation of the human self as a body in pain, a suffering body.” (173)

²¹⁹ According to Mark C. Taylor even secularised modern searches for selfhood are not remote from this internalised narrative of ‘journey’: “such secularized searches for self bear the mark of their common spiritual ancestor: biblical pilgrimage. Life continues to be understood as a journey whose way leads from sickness to health, *salus*, salvation.” *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard*, 8

²²⁰ David Gouwens is correct, I believe, in arguing that Kierkegaard’s “psychological terminology” is closer to “another tradition that predates the Idealist-existentialist tradition of immediate self-presence, and that is an Augustinian narrative understanding of the self.” *Kierkegaard As Religious Thinker*, 90. Equally Jørgen Pedersen writes, “Contrary to the idealistic consciousness of self, S.K. discovers anew what is permanently, in Augustinianism, a matter of chief concern, viz. the Christian cognition of the self which, by way of the individual conversion, exists before God, and which... is also cognition of God.” ‘Augustine and Augustinianism’, ed. Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup, *A Kierkegaard Critique*, 93

²²¹ *The Confession of St. Augustine*, 49

Descartes the whole of the reflexive turn is to achieve a quite self-sufficient certainty.”²²² Furthermore, “this new conception of inwardness, an inwardness of self-sufficiency, of autonomous powers of ordering by reason, *also* prepared the ground for modern unbelief.”²²³ This keystone for the ‘death of God’ and consequent ‘death of self’ – an implication unforeseen by Descartes – was formed by a severance of anthropology from theology and the ‘other’, and also to some degree by a reliance upon a subject-object thought paradigm implicit in the solipsism of the *cogito ergo sum*. The modern Cartesian ‘self’ strives to sustain itself as both the subject and the object of its own self-knowledge – though introspection inevitably vanquishes itself by this very insufferable tension.

For Don Cupitt the ‘self’ has become so irrecoverably dependent upon this subject-object structure that “The duality between subject and object goes, and the self therefore disappears.”²²⁴ The ‘inner self’, as Cupitt sees it, was regulated by an “outer-inner dualism” to the extent of establishing a personal metaphysical dualism of public/private, appearance/reality internalised within each individual.²²⁵ Cupitt collapses what he detects as a Pauline metaphysical dualism in deference to emphasising the contemporary primacy of the “immanence” and “appearance” of the person: “A person has become merely a personality, a mask, and improvised role. Nowadays we are all parts, not soul.”²²⁶ Disavowed of the archaic metaphysical heritage of the soul, Cupitt’s diagnosis seems to sit within the postmodern perspective in which, as Lyotard explains, “A *self* does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before.”²²⁷

Inevitably, as Tillich explains, “A self which has become a matter of calculation and management has ceased to be a self. It has become a thing. You must participate in a self in order to know what it is. But by participating you change it.”²²⁸ In the light of recent assertions about the ‘self’ one must ask whether any form of the idea of selfhood can survive the ‘death of the self’. It must be recognised that it is predominantly the ‘self’ as *Cartesian res cogitans* which has been indicted in deference to an increasingly ‘de-centred self’.²²⁹ As such, Charles Taylor concedes that universal, metaphysical, or ontological descriptions of selfhood are no longer revealing; “this word [‘self’] now describes an area of questioning. It designates the kind of being of which this question of identity can be asked.”²³⁰ But can the ‘self’, in any form, endure its own dissolution at its own hands? As Stanley Corngold phrases it, “Can a self be itself and know that the act by which it is known ‘disowns’ it?... If the self cannot be focused and cannot be centred, it is only this ‘cannot’.”²³¹ In other words, has the self become only the melancholy impossibility of self-possession: an elegiac question mark inscribed over a space of absence?

²²² *Sources of the Self*, 156

²²³ *Ibid.*, 158

²²⁴ Preface, *The Time Being*, 1

²²⁵ *The Time Being*, 22-24

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 26

²²⁷ *The Postmodern Condition*, 15

²²⁸ *The Courage To Be*, 124

²²⁹ See Stanley Corngold, *The Fate of the Self: German Writers and French Theory*, 3.

²³⁰ *Sources of the Self*, 184

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 8

In many ways, the question of the self resembles the riddle of the Sphinx: the question whose answer is 'Man'.²³² It is Oedipus who solves the Sphinx's murderous enigma, and yet it is Oedipus's tragedy to destroy everything by marrying his mother and killing his father because he does not know their, and therefore his own, true identity: "the one who knows what man is does not know who he is."²³³ And so Oedipus destroys all that is given to him – destroys himself because, though he knows 'man' he does not know 'this man'. He is never free from the irony of the question. In Hegel's reading, the content of the Sphinx's riddle is "the human being, the free self-knowing spirit."²³⁴ Elsewhere Hegel writes, "The explanation of the symbol [of the sphinx] lies in the absolute meaning, in the spirit, just as the famous Greek inscription calls to man: Know thyself."²³⁵ It is the translation of the Sphinx into Greek mythology which, for Hegel, signifies the transition from the obscurity of the Egyptian religion to the clarity of God known as Spirit [*Geist*] in Greek religion. And yet, in Despland's reading, the nemesis is upon Oedipus precisely because Oedipus solved the riddle without any appeal to the wisdom of the gods and consequently endeavoured to become the equal of his father. Essentially the nemesis of the riddle is unleashed because "Oedipus made himself *isotheos*, equal to god."²³⁶ The retribution of the question is the indecipherable repetition of the question which is put to 'man'. To escape this, one must turn the riddle over, as Oedipus may have failed to do, to the other: "man is the question put to God, to which only God can give the answer."²³⁷

The enigma of selfhood is that in the attempt to answer to itself, the self must multiply and defer itself through the very act of perception or questioning: the self lies in its irreconcilable future. As Corngold writes, "The self becomes always the future project of the perceiving self... The self is a permanent fugitive, escaping itself into the future of unceasing self-reflection."²³⁸ This task of 'becoming oneself' situates its struggle in the gap between the 'perceiving self' and the 'future self'. In this sense, one could describe selfhood as abyssal. One might say that between the question and answer of the riddle a gap has opened up inside myself, and I have fallen into it. Here the enigma of selfhood delivers us over to doubting. It is within this abyss in the self that Anti Climacus situates his anatomy of despair. As one commentator writes, "despair is an existential gap within oneself, the willful and errant doubling in one's personality, the failure to be oneself."²³⁹ The cipher to this abyss is within the word itself: 'despair' [*Fortvivlelse*]. Whereas the English word 'despair' [from the Old French

²³² The Sphinx in Greek mythology being the creature who terrorised by posing riddles and killing all who were unable to solve them. The riddle which Oedipus famously solved was: 'A being with four feet has two feet and three feet, and only one voice; but its feet vary, and when it has most it is weakest.' Oedipus solved the riddle by identifying that being as Man, who crawls on all fours as an infant, then stands on his own two feet, and finally supports himself with a staff at old age. Upon Oedipus' answer the Sphinx killed itself. In other words, the Sphinx poses the murderous riddle, the answer to which is 'Man'. It is only when the riddle is solved that the question destroys itself and the one who answers is emancipated.

²³³ Michel Despland, 'On Not Solving Riddles Alone', ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 150-151

²³⁴ 'The Religions of Transition b. The Egyptian Religion', *Lectures On the Philosophy of Religion: volume II – Determinate Religion*, 639

²³⁵ *Aesthetics: Lectures On Fine Art Volume I*, 361

²³⁶ 'On Not Solving Riddles Alone', 152

²³⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 98

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 8

²³⁹ Gregory Beabout, 'Existential Despair in Kierkegaard', *Philosophy and Theology*, Winter 1992, 174

desperer] literally means ‘without hope’ [French *désespoir*: *de* – ‘without’; *espoir* – ‘hope’], the Danish word *Fortvivelse* has its root in the German *Verzweifeln*. Both *Fortvivelse* and *Verzweifeln* share a mutual structure: the root of both words is the word for ‘doubt’ [*tvivl/zweifel*], while the prefixes denote intensification [*for-/ver-*]; as such, *Fortvivelse* and *Verzweifeln* both mean literally ‘intensified doubt’. However, Kierkegaard’s use of the word suggests more than the cognitive activity of doubting. As Gregory Beabout explains, “The movement from doubt to despair, from *tvivl* to *fortvivelse*, is not made by a quantitative increase in one’s cognitive powers. Rather, despair is an existential act.”²⁴⁰ While *Fortvivelse* is etymologically centred around ‘doubt’ [*tvivl*], in its existential intensification – especially where doubt of oneself is concerned – it clearly encompasses the Anglo-French sense of despair as ‘hopelessness’. In fact, as shall be examined, the most fatal aspect of *Fortvivelse* is precisely that it relinquishes all hope in the possibility of salvation.

However, it is in its relation to *tvivl* that *Fortvivelse* connotes something which is lost in the translation of ‘despair’. As the German *Zweifel* and the English ‘doubt’ are both indicative of ‘two’ [*zwei*; ‘double’], the Danish *tvivl*, though not as etymologically explicit, is suggestive of the Danish *to* [‘two’]. Once the anatomy of despair in *The Sickness Unto Death* is examined, the sense of doubling or splitting comes into focal prominence. The duality of the human being is diagnosed in the notoriously abstract and cryptic opening passage²⁴¹ to Part One of the work in which Anti-Climacus describes that: “A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self.”²⁴² Its despair could be compared with, though qualitatively different from, dizziness or vertigo.²⁴³ This formula has been expressed before, though in a more primal form, by Vigilius Haufniensis: “Man is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third. This third is spirit.”²⁴⁴ But this relation of spirit is one of

²⁴⁰ ‘Existential Despair in Kierkegaard’, 168. Beabout’s article has been instrumental in elucidating the etymological relations of *Fortvivelse*. However, Paul Tillich also draws attention to the equivalent German connection between ‘despair’ and ‘doubt, whilst “the syllable *ver-* indicates a doubt without a possible answer.” Invoking Sartre, Tillich approximates it to the hopelessness in “the feeling of a situation from which there is ‘no exit’.” *Systematic Theology*, II, 86-87

²⁴¹ Kierkegaard expressed his own concern over the often incongruous lyrical title of the work and its sometimes dry formulaic style (JP 5:6136 / Pap. VIII¹ A 651). Much of the awkwardness of the work is concentrated in the apparently Hegelian terminology of the opening. Beabout claims that here “Kierkegaard is poking fun at the abstract jargon of the Hegelians. Yet, at the very same time that he is mocking obtuse Hegelian formulas, he is using the abstract style to set forth his view of the self, a view that is crucially different from Hegel’s.” ‘Kierkegaard on the Self and Despair: An Interpretation of the Opening Passage of *The Sickness Unto Death*’, *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, Volume 62, 1988, 107. However, Jon Stewart draws attention to the historical detail that “Hegel’s philosophy was no longer in vogue in 1849 when *The Sickness Unto Death* appeared. The heyday of Hegelianism in Denmark had already come and gone. This would seem to undermine the point of writing a book that covertly satirizes Hegel’s philosophy.” *Kierkegaard’s Relation to Hegel Reconsidered*, 592. Although the book evidently recalls Hegel, there was a diminished polemical need to explicitly caricature Hegelianism. Consequently, where Hegel can be heard to speak in the work there is little need to point a finger of mockery.

²⁴² SUD, 13

²⁴³ “The possibility of dizziness lies in the synthesis of the psychical and the physical as a relation (but not as a relation that relates itself to itself, which is a qualification of spirit).” Pap. VIII² 170:7 [Deleted from final draft]

²⁴⁴ CA, 43

anxiety²⁴⁵ – a relation which Haufniensis later tells us is always “sympathetic and antipathetic”, an ambivalent serpentine dance of seduction and revulsion.²⁴⁶ According to Anti-Climacus, the human being, as a synthesis of two apparently contrary sets of principles, has not yet become a self. “Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation’s relating itself to itself in the relation. The self is not the relation [the synthesis] but is the relation’s relating itself to itself.”²⁴⁷ The synthesis relates opposites, but it is only in the synthesis’s relation *of itself to itself* – not only as a relation to the duality – that it becomes “the positive third, and this is the self.”²⁴⁸

But how does the relation relate to itself and not merely to the duality? A self “must either have established itself or have been established by another.”²⁴⁹ The first option one might read as the cartography of the modern self striving to authenticate itself in the space of its self-reflection.²⁵⁰ It is in the self established by another that a further movement of openness is posited in the relation to that other. If there is another then “this relation, the third, is yet again a relation and relates itself to that which established the entire relation.”²⁵¹ Conceived visually: in the first option, the gaze of the relation’s relating to itself falls back upon itself in the form of self-reflection; in the second, the gaze returns through the eyes of the other and as such is a further relation to another. “The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another.”²⁵² Without this other, the gaze of the self is sophisticated Narcissism: nothing more than the mirror of paganism’s ‘Know Thyself’. In Christian terms, Kierkegaard writes, “that is

²⁴⁵ CA, 44

²⁴⁶ CA, 103

²⁴⁷ SUD, 13

²⁴⁸ SUD, 13

²⁴⁹ SUD, 13

²⁵⁰ Beabout reads this formulation as indicative of “the ethical self”, as exemplified by Judge William’s exhortation to the young aesthete in *Either/Or* Volume II to “choose yourself” (‘Kierkegaard on the Self and Despair’, 109-111. I am not convinced of the extent to which Beabout asserts that the three forms of despair in the title of Part A (“in despair not to be conscious of having a self (not despair in the strict sense; in despair not to will to be oneself; in despair to will to be oneself”) correspond to the three spheres of existence (aesthetic, ethical, religious) because I believe that these forms of despair arise in various guises across the spheres. This lack of clarity aside, there are good reasons why the Judge is a helpful illustration. Judge William encourages A to forsake melancholy and “choose despair... one cannot despair without choosing.” (E/O II, 177). For the Judge despair can only take one form and that is “in despair not to will to be oneself” – which A can surmount if he wills his life as despair. However, the Judge’s notion that “one cannot despair without choosing” seems to deny the possibility of the unconsciously “in despair to will to be oneself”: a choice which, from the ethical sphere, is not chosen *as despair* and only recognised as such in the religious. As such, the Judge does not relate the ethical self to the self before God, but rather “By the individual’s intercourse with himself he impregnates himself and brings himself to birth.” (E/O II, 217). Therefore, Beabout concludes that “Judge Williams’ fault is that he thought his willing to be a self was sufficient for an equilibrium of his personality. Sartre may be a perfect example of this kind of despair; he wants to be himself and at the same time deny that he is a creature.” (‘Kierkegaard on the Self and Despair’, 114). Beabout is consciously opposing Paul Dietrichson’s over-identification of Judge William and Anti Climacus in ‘Kierkegaard’s Concept of the Self’, *Inquiry*, Vol. III, spring 1965, pp. 1-32. Furthermore, I believe that Beabout’s work raises important problems for George J. Stack’s assertion that for Kierkegaard “the essence of man is to exist as a particular, individual person who is engaged in the persistent striving to realize his highest ethical potentialities”. ‘Kierkegaard: The Self as Ethical Possibility’, *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy*, 3, 52. See also Stack’s ‘Kierkegaard and Ethical Existence’, *Ethics*, Vol. 83, No. 2 (January 1973), pp. 108-125. However, one implication of the above reading is that, from the perspective of the religious, it renders *Either/Or* a fundamentally negative *Neither/Nor*.

²⁵¹ SUD, 13

provisional – know yourself – and look at yourself in the mirror of the Word in order to know yourself properly. No true self knowledge without God knowledge or before God. To stand before the mirror means to stand before God.”²⁵³ Or, in Anti-Climacus’ words: “The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it.”²⁵⁴

It is this ontological dependence which identifies the self-reflective gaze as a form of “in despair to will to be oneself”: something which only exists because there is actually another authentic way to become oneself, and that is in relation to the establishing power. “If a human self had established itself, then there could be only one form: not to will to be oneself, but there could not be the form: in despair to will to be oneself.”²⁵⁵ From the first perspective all willing to be oneself would be inherently authentic; only not willing to be oneself would constitute despair. However, the existence of this “second formula [in despair to will to be oneself] is specifically the expression for the complete dependence of the relation (of the self), the expression for the inability of the self to arrive at or to be in equilibrium and rest by itself, but only, in relating itself to itself, by relating itself to that which has established the entire relation.”²⁵⁶

If this is to be read as an expression of the modern self-reflective self’s inability to authenticate itself, then one must also acknowledge that, instead of only advocating a postmodern erasure of the project of selfhood, Anti-Climacus is also attempting to re-situate the self relationally before God.²⁵⁷ In this sense, the third which also reconciles the two expresses the possibility of grounding the self in the establishing power. Here is the ontological facet of despair as more than the *feeling* of despair: it becomes a misrelation. As a misrelation rather than mere emotion, despair can be something that one remains essentially unconscious of.²⁵⁸ It must be revealed by the other. Finally,

²⁵² SUD, 13-14

²⁵³ JP 4:3902 / Pap. X4 A 412. Martin Andic disputes this distinguishing of Christianity over paganism in terms of the former situating self-knowledge “before God”. On the contrary, “Socrates, the pagan who so famously sought to know himself, did seek to know himself precisely before God.” ‘The Mirror’, ed. Robert L. Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Volume 21: For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!*, 355. While Andic is right to emphasise self-knowledge’s contingency upon the eye of the other in Socratic ignorance, it is also important to affirm that the identity of the God before whom one stands is a crucial differentiating factor between Christianity and paganism: a difference elucidated in Johannes Climacus’s *Philosophical Fragments*.

²⁵⁴ SUD, 14

²⁵⁵ SUD, 14

²⁵⁶ SUD, 14

²⁵⁷ “In this strife, this holy war [for self-mastery], then, the self must wrestle itself to a standstill and, in doing so, discover its actual inability to be itself... For in this annihilation [of the self] we learn that, since we cannot bring about the unification of the self by our own efforts, the achievement of authentic selfhood depends utterly and solely on divine grace. The annihilation of the individual is his transfiguration in God.” Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, 169

²⁵⁸ Haim Gordon rejects what he reads as Kierkegaard’s “monism of despair” because he sees that, as an ontological assertion, it is incommensurable with such phenomena as the life of Socrates who he believes, by not exhibiting despair, “defies Kierkegaard’s description of man’s ontological state.” ‘A Rejection of Kierkegaard’s Monism of Despair’, ed. Robert Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Sickness Unto Death*, 241. Among others, Gordon also perceives contradictions of a monism of despair in Nietzsche, Dostoyevski, Berdyaev and also in the human experiences of “active love, creativity, and joy” (245). Although he acknowledges that Kierkegaard’s is not the (English) dictionary definition of despair as hopelessness, Gordon fails to appreciate the etymological relation to

when “despair is completely rooted out” then “in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it.”²⁵⁹ And yet this relation, which Anti Climacus concludes is faith, is an activity of becoming rather than being. As shall hopefully become clearer, becoming transparent to oneself before God, to see oneself through the eyes of God – in the mirror of the Word – is a becoming whose being is ultimately eschatological.²⁶⁰ As such, the self – if one wishes to conceive it in this modern vocabulary – is in a sense a journey whose destination is always deferred rather than possessed.

Ultimately for Anti-Climacus, the self becomes itself in the relation “before God”: the relation relates itself to itself, not in its own eyes or the reflective mirror of Narcissus, but through the eyes of God or the mirror of the Word. But if ‘God is dead’, then surely the ‘self’ is also abandoned to the impossibility of becoming itself, for it cannot do so alone. Without God the self has only its melancholy failure to become itself on which to meditate. If God is dead, then there is no “in despair to will to be oneself”; or else it is a despair without resolution – and surely this itself is either a new form of despair or else the abolition of this despair along with the God of despair. Perhaps there is only “in despair not to will to be oneself”, as some kind of “bad faith” as atheistic existentialism may have understood it; or else this is no longer despair but only acceptance of the ‘death of selfhood’. In other words, perhaps the only real despair of postmodernity is “in despair to will to be oneself”, insofar as it represents an inability to accept the irrevocable veracity of the ‘death of the self’.

Post-Mortem Dei: A Communal Grave

The self is only the shadow which sin and error cast by stopping the light of God,
and I take this shadow for a being.

Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 35

[O]ne who has gazed into the empty mirror can never regard God or self as he did
before.²⁶¹

doubt which is explicit in despair’s juxtaposition to faith. As such, Gordon falls into the error of conceiving Kierkegaardian despair primarily as something consciously emotional. This is a common vexation for English readers, as Beabout clarifies, unfamiliar with the connotations of *Fortvivelse*. “The problem comes from understanding despair to be solely a feeling, that is, part of one’s awareness. For Kierkegaard, it is possible to be in despair without being aware of it since it is possible to take up the task of being oneself without negative feelings... and even if it begins to surface, self-deceit makes it possible to ignore and repress the feeling.” ‘Existential Despair in Kierkegaard’, 172.

²⁵⁹ SUD, 14

²⁶⁰ “[Kierkegaard] describes the self both as something I am and as something I must become, both as a substance and as something to be achieved.” C. Stephen Evans, ‘Kierkegaard’s View of the Unconscious’, ed. Martin Matušík and Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, 83. I would add to this that the self also involves something that is given – hopefully this meaning shall become clear in due course. I agree with David Gouwens that “Kierkegaard does not find the uniqueness of the self to be either the Cartesian ‘ghost in the machine’ or a given self discovered through introspection. This is because the self, for Kierkegaard, is acquired rather than given, formed rather than discovered”. *Kierkegaard As Religious Thinker*, 57. However, the self involves something given by God insofar as it is “an infinite concession, given to man, but it is also eternity’s claim upon him.” (SUD, 21).

²⁶¹ Taylor, *Deconstructing Theology*, 103

To know oneself, Kierkegaard writes, is to see oneself in the divine mirror. But in this purported lacuna of the now vacant mirror of God the self sees only its self-reflection where once it had seen itself reflected through God. The 'self' emerges into the new dawn of its autonomy, it defines itself without 'God' and so it kills 'God'. However, the necessary consequence of the disappearance of 'God' "is the disappearance of the self that killed him. When the conceptual ground of self-interiority dies, the self-as-self interior must die as well".²⁶² Subsequently alone and unable to possess itself as the object of its own subjectivity, the 'self' then dies – no longer able to transcend and re-possess itself from a higher vantage point. The innovative possibilities of the 'self-creating self' have transpired as impossibilities. After Nietzsche's prophecy, writes Ralph Harper, "there ought to have been a new dawn, new horizons, an open sea. Man ought to feel cheerful; his logic ought to be gay."²⁶³ But such failure to produce a new truth and the inability or unwillingness of most people to face the dizzying anxiety of their own alleged freedom to create themselves initiated the human 'self' into the terrible secret of its own annihilation. Unable to depend on anything beyond itself and incapable of sustaining its own vital creativity, the relatively recent phenomena of the autonomous 'self' faces its own dissolution. As Mark C. Taylor puts it, "the death of God finds its completion in the death of selfhood."²⁶⁴

Accordingly, as Tillich sees it, "Twentieth century man has lost a meaningful world and a self which lives its own meanings out of a spiritual centre."²⁶⁵ Modern humanity is thrown into an abyss, not simply of 'God', but of the disorientation and dissolution of its own 'self'. In the post-mortem of 'God' it transpires that whatever has killed 'God' is contagious. "The decisive event which underlies the search for meaning and the despair of it in the twentieth century is the loss of God in the nineteenth century."²⁶⁶ The 'death of God' initiates "the crisis that comes when man no longer knows what it means to be human and becomes aware that he does not know this."²⁶⁷

We have been living in what Martin Buber called the period of the "eclipse of God". The divine light ceases to illuminate the world in which the melancholy modern subject finds itself. But an eclipse is an event which does not endure indefinitely: "the eclipse of the light of God is no extinction; even to-morrow that which has stepped in between may give way."²⁶⁸ For Rubenstein, however, Buber's phrase attempts to moderate the modern sense of irrevocable profanity. It is a compromise which clings to an extinguished hope.²⁶⁹ Buber shrinks away from the 'death of God' and cleaves to the hope that whatever shadow has come between us and divinity shall move aside. Buber clings to a thread which for Rubenstein is irremediably broken: "We stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any purposeful power beyond our resources."²⁷⁰

²⁶² Mary-Jane Rubenstein, 'Unknow Thyself: Apophaticism, Deconstruction, and Theology After Ontotheology', 393

²⁶³ *The Seventh Solitude*, 4

²⁶⁴ *Deconstructing Theology*, 89

²⁶⁵ *The Courage To Be*, 138

²⁶⁶ Tillich, *The Courage To Be*, 141

²⁶⁷ Friedman, *Problematic Rebel*, 456

²⁶⁸ Martin Buber, 'God and the Spirit of Man', *The Eclipse of God*, 129

²⁶⁹ *After Auschwitz*, 250

²⁷⁰ *After Auschwitz* [First edition], 153. Rubenstein, however, came to moderate his own opinion of cosmological desolation. See Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 311

Yet, as suggested in the introduction, an ontological verdict inferred from God's silence is not open to us if, as Nicholas Wolterstorff suggests, "The silence of God is not an ontologically necessitated silence. It is not like the silence of the rocks and the hills, of which it is only metaphorically true that they speak ... The silence of the biblical God is the silence of a God who speaks."²⁷¹ But, if one withdraws from an ontological verdict of death, then what is to be made from this silence? Does God's silence not also impose silence upon us – a paralysis of speech about God? As Jean-Luc Marion asks, "To what silence are we summoned today? Death, preeminently, imposes silence; the emptiness of infinite spaces opposes its suffocating vacuity like an eternal silence; aphasia [loss of speech associated with sceptical silence] desertlike, grows with its silence."²⁷² Does this silence, which for Marion "threatens modernity more than any other", convey a sense of *apophatic* honour for the ineffable,²⁷³ or does it rather express "contempt, renunciation, the avowal of impotence," or even idolatry?²⁷⁴ Much depends upon the nature of this deathly silence. Who or what is it that has become silent? While an ontological assertion evades us, it can be said that the 'death of God' does speak with some veracity about the death of a particular understanding of God. For Marion, among others, the God who has died in the 'death of God' is essentially an idol. This death should not cause us to become confused about the silence between us and God: "To remain silent does not suffice in order to escape idolatry, since preeminently, the characteristic of the idol is to remain silent, and hence to let men remain silent when they no longer have anything to say – not even blasphemies."²⁷⁵

Nietzsche succeeds in ushering in the 'twilight of the idols'; but 'the idol', as Marion explains, is that which "allows the divine to occur only in man's measure."²⁷⁶ The idol is constructed on an apex of thought which thought has submitted to. 'God' is the projection of our own desire for transcendence – unrealisable because hypostasised as the other who demands my incapacity. In this sense, Feuerbach also assaulted the idol of the imagination. For Marion, 'God' as *causa sui* is the idol.²⁷⁷ As such, the 'death of God' errs as much as it succeeds. It is iconoclasm which reaches its limit in recognising itself as such. The 'death of God', as Marion observes, "presupposes a determination of God that formulates him in a precise concept; it implies then, at first, a grasp of the divine that is limited and for that reason intelligible."²⁷⁸ As such, Marion rightly wishes to add quotation marks to the 'God' who is indicted in the 'death of God'.²⁷⁹ And still the implication is that one must supplement the 'self' with the equivalent cautious quotation marks. As Mary-Jane Rubenstein explains, "We have killed him ['God'] because we created him in the first place, because there was never any God to ground us *as ourselves* –

²⁷¹ Wolterstorff, 'The Silence of the God Who Speaks', ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser, *Divine Hiddenness*, 215-216

²⁷² *God Without Being*, 54

²⁷³ Re. Pseudo-Dionysius' plea "to honour in respectful silence the hidden things which are beyond me." *The Celestial Hierarchy*, XV, 9

²⁷⁴ *God Without Being*, 54

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 107

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 15

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 35

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 29

²⁷⁹ "the 'death of God' presupposes a concept equivalent to that which it apprehends under the name of 'God'." *Ibid.*

only 'God', which was nothing but the product of our thought. And so we are free... Except. Except we were the ones oppressing us; killing God, we've killed ourselves."²⁸⁰

The Death of the Idol and The Death of the Ego?

[Y]ou may have killed God beneath the weight of all that you have said; but don't imagine that, with all that you are saying, you will make a man that will live longer than he."²⁸¹

It is worth remembering that in Nietzsche the 'death of God' begins with the gaze of God. One is looked upon by a "strange God, a voyeuristic God (recalling the Sartrean stare)."²⁸² It is 'The Ugliest Man' who murdered 'God' because he could neither bear the intrusion of 'God's witness to his shame, nor could he shake his resentment of 'God's pity for him:

But he *had to die*: he saw with eyes that saw everything; he saw man's depths and ultimate grounds, all his concealed disgrace and ugliness. His pity knew no shame: he crawled into my dirtiest nooks. This most curious, overobtrusive, overpitying one had to die. He always saw me: on such a witness I wanted to have revenge or not live myself. The god who saw everything, *even man* – this god had to die! Man cannot bear it that such a witness live."²⁸³

The despair of the 'Ugliest Man', the despair which descends into pathological Deicide, results from a conception of 'God' as, in Haar's words, "the dysfunctional projection of a persecution complex and a delirium of self-accusation. 'God' is only the hypostasis of a delirious bad conscience, magnified by the metaphysical dimension into a constant presence."²⁸⁴ This 'God' is indiscernible from an inner universe of secret guilt which incarnates itself as the morbid externalisation of self-indictment. There is a Narcissism of guilt apparent here. Indeed, Nietzsche's Zarathustra also discerned that "This fellow too loved himself, even as he despised himself".²⁸⁵ As such, Haar continues, "God's murder, the hyperbole of aggression, is the desperate attempt by man, suffering from himself, to get rid of the cause of his suffering."²⁸⁶ But the crucial misinterpretation is the belief in the "delirious bad conscience" as the infliction which comes from the 'Other', the 'Master'. This conscience is ultimately self-interpretative: self-indictment projected onto the transcendent and incontestable height.

The 'self' thus transforms itself into an object for an imagined other 'subject'. This 'God' is essentially the desire of the 'self' to know itself as its own object except that, in this instance, the 'self' which fails to grasp itself projects itself in a movement of alienation in which it experiences itself as an essentially guilty object. And yet rebellion is inevitable insofar as this guilt itself becomes something alien: in Camus' words, "an attempt is made to get him to admit his guilt. He feels innocent. To tell, the truth, that is all he feels – his irreparable innocence."²⁸⁷ He frees himself of 'God', who was only ever his metaphysically established self-indictment at the impossibility of possessing himself. He becomes nothing more or less than the assassin of his own imagination. He identified sin as metaphysics and

²⁸⁰ 'Unknow Thyself', 410

²⁸¹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 211

²⁸² Michael Harr, 'Nietzsche and the Metamorphosis of the Divine', *Post-Secular Philosophy*, 160

²⁸³ Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra: Fourth Part, *The Portable Nietzsche*, 378-379

²⁸⁴ 'Nietzsche and the Metamorphosis of the Divine', 162

²⁸⁵ Thus Spoke Zarathustra: Fourth Part, *The Portable Nietzsche*, 379

²⁸⁶ 'Nietzsche and the Metamorphosis of the Divine', 163

²⁸⁷ *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 53

atoned for it with the sacrifice of heteronomy. The 'God' who originated in the desire of the 'self' to know itself is murdered in the rebellion of the 'self' against its metaphysically self-established self-indictment.

It is, as Tillich elucidates, precisely this 'subject-object' paradigm in the divine-human encounter which causes the "God of theological theism" to be killed:

God as a subject makes me into an object which is nothing more than an object. He deprives me of my subjectivity because he is all-powerful and all-knowing. I revolt and try to make *him* into an object, but the revolt fails and becomes desperate. God appears as the invincible tyrant, the being in contrast with whom all other things are without freedom and subjectivity...
... This is the God Nietzsche said had to be killed because nobody can tolerate being made into a mere object of absolute knowledge and absolute control.²⁸⁸

In transcending the "God of theological theism", Tillich extols the "God above the God of theism" who encounters humanity beyond the subject-object structure.²⁸⁹ Despite his relation of God and 'being-itself', Tillich is not concerned with metaphysical speculation about God in Godself.²⁹⁰ It is in "participating in the power of being-itself" that the self "receives itself back".²⁹¹

Hence one may wish to assert with Paul Ricoeur that Nietzsche has only closed one possibility: "that of an ontotheology culminating in a moral God who would be the principle and foundation for an ethics of prohibition and condemnation."²⁹² However, Merold Westphal differentiates the tradition of metaphysics – a thread running from Anaximander to Nietzsche – from "the tradition that stretches from Augustine to Kierkegaard."²⁹³ As such, Westphal – like Ricoeur who regards the "school of suspicion" as a theological asset²⁹⁴ – believes that Christian theology can appropriate much from the atheism of modernity by regarding its critiques of religion as empathic with Biblical indictments of inauthentic religion.²⁹⁵ Valuing Nietzsche, Feuerbach, Heidegger et al, Westphal makes a plea "for a religiously motivated hermeneutics of suspicion."²⁹⁶ And Westphal is not alone in applauding philosophy's iconoclasm of (philosophy's) Unmoved Mover. Jürgen Moltmann, for example, identifies

²⁸⁸ *The Courage To Be*, 178-179

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 180

²⁹⁰ "Like Kierkegaard, Tillich considers talk of the existence of God to be bad theological grammar. Rocks exist; plants exist; animals exist; human beings exist; but the God beyond God, transcending theism, does not exist." Shrag, *The Self After Postmodernity*, 136. Similarly, Shrag quotes Kierkegaard Johannes Climacus from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: "God does not think, he creates: God does not exist, he is eternal." Cited in *The Self After Postmodernity*, 135.

²⁹¹ *The Courage To Be*, 181

²⁹² 'Religion, Atheism, and Faith', *The Religious Significance of Atheism*, 68

²⁹³ *Overcoming Ontotheology*, 257. Westphal implores that:

"We must think God as that mystery that exceeds the wisdom of the Greeks.

We must think God as the voice that exceeds vision so as to establish a relation irreducible to comprehension.

We must think God as the gift of love who exceeds not merely the images but also the concepts with which we aim at God." (270) [italics original]

Such a God "who comes 'after' the overcoming of onto-theologically constituted metaphysics" Westphal identifies as the God of Augustine (273-284).

²⁹⁴ 'Religion, Atheism, and Faith', *The Religious Significance of Atheism*, 68

²⁹⁵ *Suspicion and Faith*, 10

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 284

that "Aristotle's God cannot love... The 'unmoved Mover' is a 'loveless Beloved.'" ²⁹⁷ This God can be loved for His moral beauty, but He is caught up within Himself, unable to love that which is not like Him: "he is the beloved who is in love with himself, a Narcissus in a metaphysical degree." ²⁹⁸

Eventually, the "metaphysically established God," Eberhard Jüngel likewise explains, seems to have been "destroyed by his own perfection." ²⁹⁹ This 'God' is incarcerated in His own self-consummation. It is this 'God' who has been rendered incoherent by the *passio* of modernity; 'God's perfect *essence* is contradicted by human *existence*.' ³⁰⁰ The metaphysical deity, Jüngel identifies, is elevated "over us"; death is "under us". Death and transcendence are mutually exclusive: "it would appear as if one has torn the being of God apart. The thought of God appears to have destroyed itself." ³⁰¹ But the thought which has destroyed itself is the thought of 'God' which has been identified as an idol of onto-theology. But can one justifiably evacuate onto-theology from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Perhaps the mysterious disclosure of the divine name holds the cipher to the onto-theological contamination of Christian theology whilst also pointing beyond the 'death of God'.

Receiving The Holy Name

It is in the enigmatic call of Moses from the midst of the burning bush that God reveals the esoteric divine name as *'ehyeh asher 'ehyeh*. This self-concealing, as much as self-revealing, disclosure has been simplified by the common variant English translation 'I am that I am'. It is this which Altizer calls "a self-naming which is not only the beginning of divine or ultimate speech, but therein and thereby is the release and the embodiment of total actuality, an actuality which is itself the origin of a full and total releasement." ³⁰² Yet is it perhaps anathema to talk about this self-naming in terms of "embodiment of total actuality" or as "self-embodiment". ³⁰³ The I AM THAT I AM should certainly not be read as some divine correlative of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* – a correlation with some bearing upon the cross-contamination between the 'death of God' and the 'death of the self'. Even when Altizer writes about the I AM as "inevitably a loss of an original and total transcendence... a fall which is the self-emptying of pure transcendence", ³⁰⁴ is he not transcribing the *'ehyeh asher 'ehyeh* within an alien metaphysical dualism of presence and absence? Surely one is involved in the activity of importing terms when one talks of God, as Mark C. Taylor does, as "the absolute self-identity that resounds in the 'I AM THAT I AM.'" ³⁰⁵

²⁹⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 222

²⁹⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹⁹ *God as the Mystery of the World*, 205

³⁰⁰ *ibid.*

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 48

³⁰² 'The Beginning and Ending of Revelation', ed. Robert P. Sharlemann, *Theology At The End Of The Century: A Dialogue on the Postmodern*, 76

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 77

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 77

³⁰⁵ *Erring*, 37. Taylor does to an extent qualify that "It would be a mistake, however, to hear these words merely as the representation of simple equality-with-self... When God is understood as the absolutely self-identical, which in-itself is complex, He is grasped as substance. Substance (*substantia*: *sub*, under + *stare*, to stand) is traditionally associated with the Greek *ousia* or essence." 37

Nevertheless, one cannot simply vilify recent thought for smuggling Greek ontology into a Hebraic enigma. As Alfred Jäger points out:

The famous passage 'I am that I am' (Ex. 3:14) has nothing to do with ontology. Instead, this mysterious self-identification expresses God's pledge of himself to the dangerous path to be followed by his people. The translation of this passage in the Septuagint, however, became the entrée for Greek metaphysics into the understanding of the biblical text *Egō eimi ho ōn...* Already the Septuagint, however, translates the unintelligible predicates of God *ēl šaddai* with *pantokratōr*, through which Hellenistic apprehensions of power penetrated the biblical understanding of God.³⁰⁶

The Hebrew *'ehyeh asher 'ehyeh* is translated into the Latin as *ego sum qui sum* – which has been described as “the Thomist understanding of God as the one being whose very being it is to be (*ipsum esse subsistens*)”³⁰⁷ – even though, as Marion maintains, the “Hebrew verb *hayah* does not suffice to introduce a concept of ‘Being’.”³⁰⁸ This has not prevented many from introducing and inscribing such a concept into a Hellenised Christian understanding discomforted by such irresolvable ontological ambiguity. “In more contemporary idiom,” Kearney writes, “this verbal play [of the verb *hayah*] compels us to wonder if God is here reducing himself to a metaphysics of presence or rendering himself immune to it for good and all.”³⁰⁹

It is ultimately questionable to what extent the *'ehyeh asher 'ehyeh* can appropriately be called a “self-naming” at all. For example, when related to the Egyptian belief in magical and secret divine names of power, then Moses' request for the name of God calls to mind his impending altercation with the Egyptian magicians.³¹⁰ In this sense, does the divine response signify a name which exceeds the esoteric understanding, or a complete evasion of the magical paradigm itself? Either way, the response suggests a refusal to submit to the possessive of objectified conceptualisation. God exceeds that which can be named or comprehended in the name – as such, in Kabbalistic tradition, even mystical meditations upon the permutations of the Sacred Tetragrammaton are inexhaustible – and yet at the same time God's name expresses the substantiality of a historical relation to the material suffering of the people of Israel.

Recently, Richard Kearney has offered a reading of Exodus 3 as “‘I am who may be’ – that is, as the possibility to be, which obviates the extremes of being and non-being.”³¹¹ In reaction to the onto-theological reading, Kearney proposes an “*eschatological*” God interpreted primarily in terms of “possibility”.³¹² While Kearney remains deliberately opaque about this eschatological possibility, his emphasis upon the freedom of God from the conceptual shackles of onto-theology is a pertinent contemporary response to the *aporia* of post-metaphysical theology rooted in the ancient text of Moses' theophany. Likewise Jean-Luc Marion, in his desire to speak of “God without being”, suggests that “Being says nothing about God that God cannot immediately reject. Being, even and especially in

³⁰⁶ ‘The Living God and the Endangered Reality of Life’, *The Otherness of God*, 245

³⁰⁷ David Tracy, ‘Response to Adriaan Peperzak on Transcendence’, ed. Peperzak, *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas For Philosophy, Literature and Religion*, 195

³⁰⁸ *God Without Being*, 73

³⁰⁹ *The God Who May Be*, 22

³¹⁰ See Jean Greisch, ‘Divine Selfhood and the Postmodern Subject’, *Questioning God*, 251.

³¹¹ *The God Who May Be*, 22

³¹² *The God Who May Be*, 1

Exod. 3:14, says nothing about God, or says nothing determining about him.”³¹³ As such, Marion, in his own way, exhibits a resistance to conceptual restraints upon God which debilitate divine inventiveness. God always exceeds my efforts to possess God. God is, for Marion, thinkable “only under the figure of the unthinkable, but of an unthinkable that exceeds as much what we cannot think as what we can.”³¹⁴

The ‘unthinkableness’ of God, for Marion, forces us to erase “the idolatrous quotation marks” around ‘God’ in favour of “the very God that no mark of knowledge can demarcate.” In doing so, Marion substitutes the idol ‘God’ in favour of the caution of the Gxd who “crosses out our thought because he saturates it; better, he enters into our thought only in obliging it to criticize itself.”³¹⁵ In other words – unlike the Jewish tradition of writing ‘G-d’ which suggests absence or silence in the prohibition against speaking or writing the Holy name writing³¹⁶ – Gxd conveys the erasure of our idolatrous thinking about God. Gxd gives himself as a gift to be thought but under Gxd’s admonition of our thought. As such, in place of the ‘God’ who we struggle with for ‘being-for-itself’ and ultimately put to death, we encounter the God who gives himself to be struggled with, as Jacob struggled at Peni’el, yet who ultimately exceeds what I can ‘get my hands on’.

In exceeding as much what we cannot think as what we can think, God even surpasses our declarations of what is impossible. Kierkegaard will emphasise this for us through God’s prevailing over what humanity believes is impossible regarding the forgiveness of sins. It is this sense of divine possibility in excess of what we say is impossible – even for God – that is the secret to the paradox of our forgiveness. God’s revelation of ‘*ehyeh asher ehyeh*’ – as a promise of fidelity – expresses God’s relational deliverance of a given people, and the metaphysical *presence* of the divine per se. But does this non-ontological reading indemnify the absolute against all metaphysical speculation or inquiry? Is this the point of severance between faith and philosophical theology? The Hebrew Bible, Howard Wettstein has argued, does not impart us with a doctrine of God: “The person closest to such things, after all, was Moses, and he never got a good look [Exodus 33:23. I discuss this allegory in Chapter Three], even a straightforward statement of God’s name.”³¹⁷ As such, Wettstein suggests, Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical theology signifies an incursion of Hellenistic thought, particularly from Philo and Maimonides, into the alien territory of biblical/rabbinic Judaism. In other words, Moses did not speak Greek; or more importantly, God certainly did not speak Greek to Moses. But more than linguistic primacy, the issue for Wettstein centres upon the abstractions of Greek philosophy against a Jewish tradition in which “The primary religious works speak of God impressionistically... Their imagery is strikingly anthropomorphic.”³¹⁸

³¹³ *God Without Being*, 45

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46

³¹⁵ *God Without Being*, 46

³¹⁶ In the Hebraic tradition the holy name of God, or ‘Sacred Tetragrammaton’, YHWH is also rendered unpronounceable. This is a silence which originates in a reverent prohibition against speaking the name of God – a prohibition which has become a necessity due to absence of vowel sounds. See Richard Elliot Friedman, *The Hidden Face of God*, 139

³¹⁷ ‘Doctrine’, *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 14, No. 4, October 1997, 436. I am grateful to Dr. Daniel Rynhold for drawing my attention to this article.

³¹⁸ Wettstein, ‘Doctrine’, 423



There is a danger, however, that a recovery from onto-theology by virtue of a return to a pre-metaphysical Hebraic understanding may result in an inverse variation of what Moltmann calls the 'God' of "anthropotheism" – as much the 'God' of Feuerbach as the 'God' of Aristotle – whereby "It is not God who created man in his image but man who creates God in his."³¹⁹ But that is only the case if anthropomorphic imagery pertaining to God is *ontologised*: taken as describing God in Godself. Perhaps it is more suitable to identify such imagery as motivated from an *anthropocentrism*: that is, a desire to speak of God in terms of the human-divine relationship without denying the inscrutable, though not in all senses unrevealable, *mysterium* of the biblical God. As such, when Moses asks for the divine name he is given a name which reveals what God is to Israel and conceals an elusive enigma as to what God is to Godself: a refusal to disclose which forms a powerful reminder that God exceeds humanity, lest one believe that God is *only* what God is to me. It is the loss of the *mysterium* in Exodus 3:14 in deference to the *exclusively* anthropocentric reading of the divine name as God's name for me which constitutes a further danger. "Everything that is incomprehensible does not cease to exist", writes Pascal³²⁰ – the spirit of the enigma within the Holy Name.

Surely in some agreement with this Pascalian sentiment, Kierkegaard is likewise rather mystified by the 'I Am Who I am': "This is an analogy to the metaphysical point that the highest principles for all thought cannot be proved but only tautologically paraphrased: introverted infinity... in this case, then, anything other than tautology would be rubbish."³²¹ But Kierkegaard does not seek salvation in metaphysics. Instead Kierkegaard is concerned with the self's relation to God, albeit a God the nature of whose absence has not been fully recognised by modernity, as shall be examined below. It is to Kierkegaard's apparently anthropocentric evaluation of the God-relationship that attention now turns.

Kierkegaard's Infinite Qualitative Difference and the 'Death of God'

Kierkegaard would already have been familiar with some expression of the 'hard saying' of the 'death of God'. Hegel had already identified the relation between loss of 'self' and loss of 'God' in terms of the 'Unhappy Consciousness'. The 'Unhappy Consciousness', as it experiences "the conscious loss of itself and the alienation of its knowledge about itself", expresses its anguish in the "hard saying that 'God is dead'."³²² This is the expression of an "infinite grief" existing historically as "the feeling that 'God Himself is dead,' upon which the religion of more recent times rests; the same feeling that Pascal expressed in, so to speak, empirical form: 'la nature est telle qu'elle *marque* partout un Dieu *perdu* et dans l'homme et hors de l'homme.' ['Nature is such that it *signifies* everywhere a *lost* God both within and outside man' – *Pensées*, (441)]"³²³ This hard saying, first announced on Golgotha, was to become

³¹⁹ *The Crucified God*, 251

³²⁰ *Pensées* 230 (430b), p.101

³²¹ JP 4:4898 / Pap. X4 A 480

³²² *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, VII, 752, p.454-455. Kierkegaard may have been acquainted with the phrase from his own Lutheran tradition. The familiar Lutheran hymn declares the death of God with a sense of eventual triumph: 'O great distress!/ God himself lies dead./ On the cross he died,/ and by doing so he has won for us the realm of heaven' (Johannes Rist, 1641).

³²³ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 190

the dark saying of the twentieth century. But for Hegel, in the nineteenth century, this saying signifies God's overcoming of the self-alienation posited in the split between Father and Son. It is as Spirit [*Geist*] that God comes back to himself in universal self-consciousness.³²⁴ God himself has died. But effectively, as Schöndorf explains, "One could expand on this sentence and say he has died unto himself. The pure selfless abstract substance is negated so that it can become self. As substance in opposition to and opposite the subject, God no longer exists."³²⁵ In mediation with creation, God effectively ceases to exist as the Wholly Other of the alienated Unhappy Consciousness.

From the Hegelian perspective, Kierkegaard's avowal of the infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity consigns him to just this primal melancholy estrangement of the Unhappy Consciousness.³²⁶ In a sense, Kierkegaard's writings embrace and transfigure this condemnation.³²⁷ By erroneously claiming to have reconciled estrangement, Hegelianism actually re-enforces estrangement in its most unconscious form – hence Kierkegaard's writings encourage the recognition of, or will to, despair as essentially constituting a rise in the consciousness of Spirit. Hegelianism, by negating this estrangement, has contributed to the death of God – an implication Kierkegaard sees particularly as it is manifest in contemporary Danish Christendom. In contrast to the Hegelian reconciliation of Creator and creation, Kierkegaard's insistence upon the infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity serves to compound and emphasise the abyssal consciousness of the otherness of God and the estrangement of humanity. As such, while Christ, who for Danish Hegelianism – particularly represented by Kierkegaard's former theological tutor Hans Martensen³²⁸ – embodies the doctrine of mediation, he is represented by Johannes Climacus as the paradox: the living contradiction between divinity and humanity.³²⁹

³²⁴ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 779 f, p.470 f

³²⁵ Harold Schöndorf, 'The Othering (Becoming Other) and Reconciliation of God in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*', ed. Jon Stewart, *The Phenomenology of Spirit Reader: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, 395

³²⁶ "Like Hegel's unhappy consciousness, Kierkegaard sees the absolute difference – the unbridgeable gulf – between man's particular, individual consciousness and the Absolute". David L. Rozema, 'Hegel and Kierkegaard On Conceiving the Absolute', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Volume 9, Number 2, April 1992, 215.

³²⁷ From this perspective Kierkegaard and Hegel represent inversions of one another: "What Hegel regards as self-realization Kierkegaard sees as self-alienation, and what Hegel interprets as self-estrangement is for Kierkegaard self-fulfilment. Conversely, what Kierkegaard views as authentic selfhood Hegel believes to be inauthentic selfhood, and what Kierkegaard sees as inauthenticity is for Hegel authenticity." Mark C. Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood*, 14

³²⁸ See Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel Reconsidered*, 341-355. Stewart's book identifies Kierkegaard's polemic as directed towards contemporary Danish Hegelians more so than Hegel himself.

³²⁹ "Kierkegaard's Absolute is not Hegel's Absolute... unlike Hegel's Absolute, Kierkegaard's God is ineffable; incomprehensible; inconceivable... Why could there not be an 'other' opposed to Reason itself – call it the 'Paradox?'" Rozema, 'Hegel and Kierkegaard On Conceiving the Absolute', 215-216. This being said, Rozema also questions the extent to which Hegel actually did regard the Absolute as a concept: "He often says that Reason is as much an *action* as an entity; as much a *subject* as an object; as much a method as a result." (216). Likewise Daniel Berthold-Bond argues that "In many ways, Hegel is as opposed to 'reason' as Kierkegaard is – to the *sort* of reason which sees itself in struggle against faith. In this sense, Kierkegaard is highly misleading when he plays on Hegel's 'advocacy' of reason as though Hegel did not himself initiate a searching critique of reason." 'Lunar Musings? An Investigation of Hegel's and Kierkegaard's Portraits of Despair', *Religious Studies* 34, 56. Contra Mark C. Taylor, Berthold-Bond suggests that "Hegel knows full well that no amount of logic can actually save the

Hegel's death of God, which proposes to overcome alienation through Spirit's becoming conscious of itself in history, implies the death of a God who is radically other to humanity – an otherness which Kierkegaard sees as an inviolable implication of human sinfulness.³³⁰ It is, however, perhaps Kierkegaardian alienation more so than Hegelian reconciliation which best describes the progression of late nineteenth/early twentieth century western European history. 'God is dead' has become a dark saying, an expression of humanity's distance from God – whether in Nietzsche's forsaking of God or more recently in God's apparent forsaking of humanity in the Holocaust. Of course, as Schöndorf observes, "Hegel probably did not count on the fact that the further history of the thought of the 'death of God' would lead rather in the direction of an unhappy consciousness instead of necessarily to a resurrection and reconciliation since to us today the night of the I=I seems more abysmal than we would sometimes like."³³¹

For now one must return to the nineteenth century and the anatomy of Kierkegaard's infinite qualitative abyss. The notion of the infinite qualitative difference clearly opposed the Hegelian doctrine of *mediation*, but the phrase also evokes broader contemporary connotations. As well as dissenting against Christendom's prostitution to the ideals of Danish Hegelianism, Kierkegaard also found himself in the midst of a definite theological crisis of historicity. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing famously identified that between "the accidental truths of history" and the "necessary truths of reason" there lay a personally uncrossable "broad ugly ditch"³³² – a phrase with some bearing upon Kierkegaard's deliberately exaggerated infinite chasmic abyss. Hegel had also confessed in his diary something of the modern suspicion towards the contemporary relevance of a historically founded religion:

In Swabia they say of something which had long since happened: it's so long ago that soon it won't be true anymore. Thus Christ died for our sins so long ago that soon it won't be true anymore.³³³

This unassailable abyss intensified in 1835 when David Strauss published his demystifying *Life of Jesus* in which the 'Jesus of history' / 'Christ of faith' debate reached a zenith. Notably Strauss's book along with the publication of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* generated significant intellectual

unhappy consciousness, that such salvation rests with a decisive choice, a leap, which 'in a positive sense remains a *beyond*' for all logic." (57)

³³⁰ Ultimately the difference is that whereas Kierkegaard's interest concerns the individual life of faith, "In Hegel the death of God is understood not only in the context of religious piety, as it had been earlier, but in the context of a philosophy of history... The religious intensity is transformed by Hegel into a moment of world history as the point at which spirit is estranged from itself." Robert P. Scharlemann, 'Introduction', *Theology At The End Of The Century*, 5

³³¹ 'The Othering (Becoming Other) and Reconciliation of God in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*', 400. On balance one must qualify that the death of God is not encountered as such an anxious abyss for all thinkers. Altizer, as Mark C. Taylor reads him, is effecting a recent Hegelian critique of the Kierkegaardian sense of God as Wholly Other apparent in twentieth century neo-orthodox theology. For Altizer, the God who is Wholly Other dies and "empties itself into the historical and cultural process in such a way that the absolute is totally present here and now." ('Postmodern Times', *The Otherness of God*, 183). If Taylor is correct in detecting a Hegelian grand narrative in his theology then Altizer is effectively situated in a distinctly *modern*, as opposed to *postmodern* paradigm. Altizer can thus be read as presenting a desire to resurrect a more Hegelian optimism in order to exorcise the Unhappy Consciousness of the death of God.

³³² See Rae, *By Faith Transformed*, 80-85.

³³³ *Dokumente za Hegele Entwicklung*, ed. J. Hoffmeister [Stuttgart: Fr. Frommann, 1936, p.358]. Cited in Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 76.

disquiet in Denmark – an unease which involved certain doctoral candidates being refused examination after betraying an affinity to such precarious ideas. Indeed even the theologian Hans Martensen felt obliged to moderate his Hegelianism for fear of being identified in complicity with such allegedly un-Christian views.³³⁴

Yet Kierkegaard, as Arbaugh observes, “remarks that the freethinkers are less muddled in interpreting Christianity, than its orthodox defenders, and that they are at least honest in calling it myth and poetry, while the latter betray their own scepticism in their lives.”³³⁵ In particular, Feuerbach (the ‘fire-brook’), despite his questionable personal weakness, “can serve for Christians as a purifying fire” [*Ild Bæk*].³³⁶ Although Kierkegaard’s infinite qualitative difference between humanity and God can be read as reacting against the grain of Feuerbach’s identification of theology and anthropology, his own relation to the earnestness of Feuerbach’s project is less reactionary than that of the general intellectual establishment. While he is himself concerned not to be identified with Feuerbach et al, it is possible, Kierkegaard suggests, to receive “*ab hoste consilium*” [advice from the enemy] from one who may be a “*malitieux dæmon*” [evil daimon].³³⁷ Although each assesses the phenomena of Christianity from differing perspectives and with divergent motives, Kierkegaard sees in Feuerbach someone likewise capable of slicing into religion and exposing an ingrained illusion. The fundamental distinction resides in the fact that what Feuerbach identifies as the illusion of Christianity is identified by Kierkegaard as the insidious delusion of Christendom. As such, Feuerbach’s critique of Christianity, despite its essential qualitative conflation, can be translated as an exposé of Christendom which itself serves as an ironic reminder of the need to insist upon the infinite qualitative difference between humanity and God. According to Kierkegaard, “Feuerbach is saying: No, wait a minute – if you are going to be allowed to go on living as you are living, then you also have to admit that you are not Christians... it is wrong of established Christendom to say that Feuerbach is attacking Christianity; it is not true, he is attacking the Christians by demonstrating that their lives do not correspond to the teachings of Christianity.”³³⁸ Consequently, as Arbaugh explains, “For Kierkegaard, for whom mere playing at Christianity is more spiritually dangerous than heresy or schism, and for whom hypocrisy is anathema, this exposé by Feuerbach came as welcome support from an unexpected quarter.”³³⁹

A similarly unexpected solidarity with Feuerbach is confessed more recently in the theology of Karl Barth – with his own insistence upon an avowedly Kierkegaardian infinite qualitative difference. This may come as some surprise since, with his insistence upon the primacy of divine revelation in direct contradiction of Feuerbach’s anthropocentrism, Barth apparently “represents the complete antithesis in religious thought to Ludwig Feuerbach.”³⁴⁰ As H. Richard Niebuhr succinctly states, “The great disagreement is that Feuerbach can so believe in man and Barth cannot; this is to no

³³⁴ See Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relation To Hegel Reconsidered*, 62 and 140.

³³⁵ George E. Arbaugh, ‘Kierkegaard and Feuerbach’, *Kierkegaardiana XI*, 8-9. See JP 1:546 / Pap. XI¹ A 70; JP 3:3530 / Pap. X5 A 62.

³³⁶ Arbaugh, ‘Kierkegaard and Feuerbach’, 9

³³⁷ JP VI: 6523 / Pap. X² A 162

³³⁸ JP VI: 6523 / Pap. X² A 162

³³⁹ Arbaugh, ‘Kierkegaard and Feuerbach’, 9

³⁴⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, Foreword, *The Essence of Christianity*, vii

small extent the difference between the nineteenth century and the twentieth.”³⁴¹ Despite this theological and historical chasm, Feuerbach represents the dangers of taking anthropology as a starting point for religious thought. As a vilified embodiment of this orientation, Feuerbach can serve as a corrective for the very thought he expounds – a corrective which may derive further intensity from the anthropological disfigurations of the early twentieth century. Man is a starting point which it has become difficult to believe in. However, this should not obscure Barth’s admiration for Feuerbach: a philosopher Barth regarded as intensely occupied with the problem of theology – “although his love was an unhappy one.”³⁴² In fact, commenting upon Feuerbach’s words, Barth observes that “‘theology long ago became anthropology,’ ever since Protestantism itself, and especially Luther, emphatically shifted the interest from what God is in himself to what God is for man. Its course of development runs uninterruptedly in such a direction that man more and more renounces God and addresses himself.”³⁴³ It is in Lutheranism itself that Christianity finds its path towards the internal monologue of theology’s dissolution by anthropology. Feuerbach, Barth and Kierkegaard are in some agreement that the absolute difference between God and humanity has been compromised within Protestantism itself. As such, in testifying to the Protestant transition towards reflection upon the self, all three share the open secret of the dissolution of Christianity into modernity – a consumption which has occurred from within.³⁴⁴

While this tendency has been mutually discerned, Kierkegaard and Barth are emphatic that the movement which Feuerbach embraces must be resisted in the strongest terms. Hence the apparently mutual prominence of the infinite qualitative difference between humanity and God as ‘Wholly Other’ in both Barth and Kierkegaard. Nevertheless, it was, Barth confesses, only around 1919 that Kierkegaard made a profound entry into his thought “at the critical juncture between the first and second editions of my *Commentary on Romans*, and from that time onwards he appeared in an important role in my literary utterances.”³⁴⁵ Of all Barth’s writings, Kierkegaard resonates most prominently through the invocations of ‘the Moment’³⁴⁶ and ‘the individual’³⁴⁷ throughout this commentary. Greater than these, however, is a discernment of the Kierkegaardian abyss, as Barth reveals in the preface to the second edition of *Der Römerbrief* (1921): “If I have a ‘system’, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the ‘infinite qualitative distinction’ between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance.”³⁴⁸ The

³⁴¹ Foreword, *The Essence of Christianity*, viii

³⁴² Karl Barth, An Introductory Essay, *The Essence of Christianity*, x

³⁴³ An Introductory Essay, *The Essence of Christianity*, xix. Charles Taylor also relates how the particularly “Protestant culture of introspection becomes secularized as a form of confessional autobiography” which in turn contributes to the formation of the secular modern novel. *Sources of the Self*, 184

³⁴⁴ “Protestantism has lived with the crisis longest and most intensely, lived with it, that is, as an internal rather than an external cataclysm. This is because Protestant thought has always been particularly open to the spirit of modernity.” Peter L. Berger, *A Rumour of Angels*, 22

³⁴⁵ ‘A Thank You and a Bow: Kierkegaard’s Reveille’, *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol. XI (1965), No. 1, 4

³⁴⁶ See for example *The Epistle to the Romans*, 116; 497-499

³⁴⁷ “It is precisely we who proclaim the right of the individual, the eternal worth of each single one (Kierkegaard!), by announcing that his soul is lost before God and, in him, is dissolved – and saved.” *Ibid.*, 116

³⁴⁸ *The Epistle to the Romans*, 10

revelation of this Kierkegaardian abyss is clearly an important moment in the initiation into faith: "In Jesus the communion of God begins with a rebuff, with the exposure of a vast chasm, with the clear revelation of a great stumbling-block."³⁴⁹

However, while Barth proceeds here to identify this stumbling-block as the Kierkegaardian offence of the infinite qualitative difference, it also begins to become clear that although Barth may begin with the Kierkegaardian abyss he is reticent to conclude with it. Barth describes himself as graduating decisively from what he called the "school of Kierkegaard". In his address in Copenhagen on April 19th 1963 upon receiving the Sonning Prize for outstanding contributions to European culture, Barth takes the opportunity to account for his relation to "the Danish Lutheran". In this retrospective, the renaissance man who had embodied the spirit of authentic Christianity's critique of apostate Christendom came to be seen as implicated in the very modern anthropocentrism he intended to vilify. Barth increasingly sensed the uneasy absence of congregation and church in Kierkegaard's thought and thereby developed a deep suspicion of the "holy individualism (*Heils-individualismus*)"³⁵⁰ in which Kierkegaard apparently protracted the Lutheran renunciation of theology's 'God in himself' in deference to the monologue of anthropology's self-address. Ultimately Barth concluded that he could not attack "man-centred Christinity as such, from a Kierkegaardian basis, because he himself had not attacked, but rather fortified it immensely."³⁵¹ Kierkegaard became nothing more or less than "a teacher into whose school every theologian must go once. Woe to him who has missed it! So long as he does not remain in or return to it!"³⁵² Barth warns how those who have failed to graduate from Kierkegaard's school are captivated by his abyss; it is as if his "infinite qualitative difference between God and man, with all its consequences, has eaten itself right into them."³⁵³ Accordingly, Barth moderated the infinite qualitative difference in his own writings to the extent that, as S   observes, it would be too stringent to claim that Barth's doctrine is taken directly from Kierkegaard since it "is demonstrably influenced both by Platonism and neo-Kantianism."³⁵⁴

Just as Niebuhr had historically distanced Barth from Feuerbach, so Barth's last word on the matter should perhaps be his summary that "Kierkegaard was bound more closely to the nineteenth century than we at the time wanted to believe."³⁵⁵ This stands as some reproach to the so-called 'Kierkegaard Renaissance' in the neo-orthodox, existential and dialectical theologies of the twentieth century which appear to suggest that, on the contrary, "Kierkegaard was, somehow, born before his time, a prophet of the crises of the twentieth century, particularly with regard to the mutual alienation of Church and State, the advent of what was called 'mass society' and the consequent sense of isolation of the individual."³⁵⁶ Finally Barth sees that, as a weapon against the malaise of the twentieth century,

³⁴⁹ *The Epistle to the Romans*, 98

³⁵⁰ 'A Thank You and a Bow: Kierkegaard's Reveille', 6

³⁵¹ 'A Thank You and a Bow: Kierkegaard's Reveille', 6

³⁵² 'A Thank You and a Bow: Kierkegaard's Reveille', 7

³⁵³ Barth, 'Kierkegaard and the Theologians', *Canadian Journal of Theology*, Vol. XIII (1967), 64

³⁵⁴ N. H. S  , 'Karl Barth', ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulov   Thulstrup, *Bibliotheca Kierkegardiana Volume 8: the Legacy and Interpretation of Kierkegaard*, 225

³⁵⁵ 'A thank You and a Bow: Kierkegaard's Reveille', 6

³⁵⁶ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture*, 177

However, Pattison asks the question, "Is the nineteenth century's ignoring of Kierkegaard perhaps yet another of the many myths that have bedevilled the reception of Kierkegaard?" (178). Habib Malik's

Kierkegaard cannot be fully transplanted from the battleground of the nineteenth. Bearing in mind Kierkegaard's relation to the cultural *aporia* of his time – Hegel, Feuerbach, Strauss et al – is it therefore anathema to assert that “Kierkegaard belonged more to the twentieth century than to the nineteenth”?³⁵⁷ Is it not rather more accurate to declare that theologians who appropriate such thought simply “deliver a nineteenth-century answer to a twentieth-century dilemma”?³⁵⁸ Or is Kierkegaard's anthropocentrism – dialectically tempered by his infinite qualitative abyss – more appropriate for a post-ontotheology?

The death of God clearly comes to mean something subtly different for Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche respectively. “Though anticipated in Hegel's speculative philosophy and Kierkegaard's attack on Christendom and proclaimed by Nietzsche's madman,” Mark C. Taylor claims, “the death of God is not concretely actualized until the emergence of the twentieth-century industrial state.”³⁵⁹ But prior to this emergence, Hegel's “hard saying” also resounded with a Feuerbachian accent: “the identification of divine and human natures means that God is human nature objectified; man's full appropriation of his own nature becomes the death of God.”³⁶⁰ Man becomes his own object in the correlation of theology and anthropology and the Wholly Other vanishes. Once exposed as an illusion, God is ripe for a fatal iconoclasm. As nineteenth century Europe, trembling with revolution, builds the scaffolds of Regicide which hallowed the ground in which the grave of ‘God’ has been dug, Kierkegaard's infinite qualitative difference between despairing humanity and the Wholly Other God appears to show him desperately enforcing an impassable gulf over which such an advancing atheism cannot cross.³⁶¹ Yet despite this apparently atheistic crisis in theology and philosophy, Kierkegaard was emphatic that “To kill God is what man cannot do, what he can do is to kill the thought of Him.”³⁶² Prior to Nietzsche's iconoclasm and the twentieth century post-mortem of ‘God’, Kierkegaard had importantly already asserted an infinite qualitative difference between God and the “thought of God” – a difference which twentieth century inheritors of the so-called ‘death of God’ have made a fertile one.

Whilst Feuerbach proclaimed the identification of theology and anthropology, Kierkegaard emphatically and repeatedly asserted the infinite qualitative difference between humanity and divinity as defying the identification of God with the self. And yet, seeing the self's implicit dependence upon God, Kierkegaard warned that, “To murder God is the most horrible form of suicide.”³⁶³ For Kierkegaard, the self is dependent upon God to the extent that to “kill the thought of God” would be tantamount to obliterating the self.³⁶⁴ In this sense, he anticipated that the ‘death of God’ was

extensive book *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: the Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought* also provides an important corrective to this impression.

³⁵⁷ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture*, 177

³⁵⁸ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, 262.

³⁵⁹ *Erring*, 6

³⁶⁰ Stephen Crites, *In the Twilight of Christendom: Hegel vs. Kierkegaard on Faith and History*, 56

³⁶¹ “The major responsibility for this new atheism is for SK in the Hegelian philosophy, and the radical symptom was above all Feuerbach.” Cornelio Fabro, ‘Atheism’, *Bibliotheca Kierkegardiana Volume 5*, 271

³⁶² ‘The Anxiety of Presumption’, CD, 69

³⁶³ ‘The Anxiety of Presumption’, CD, 70

³⁶⁴ John Elrod is right to identify that: “For Kierkegaard, as for Feuerbach, the self and religion are so intimately related that an analysis of one is impossible apart from an analysis of the other.” ‘Feuerbach

synonymous with the suicidal 'death of self'. Once 'God' has been killed, invigorated by the magnitude of his deed, *homo hominis deus* ('man is the god of man'). But, ultimately unable to sustain himself on his throne, this corrupts into the ignominy of *homo hominis lupus* ('man is a wolf to man').³⁶⁵

Yet does the infinite qualitative difference successfully immunise the thought of God against contamination by hard saying of the death of God? Or does Kierkegaard inadvertently testify to its inescapable veracity? According to Gabriel Vahanian, Kierkegaard's 'infinite qualitative difference' and Nietzsche's 'God is dead' both inevitably succumb to the same conclusion. Both are mutually resistant to immanentism; both imply that "no ladder leads from man to God... that there is no identity of substance between man and God, and, accordingly, that the problem of human existence is independent of the problem of God."³⁶⁶ Though of course Kierkegaard strove precisely to return the problem of human existence to the problem of God, it can be argued that Kierkegaard fails to defy the cultural implications of the 'death of God', and even that he implicates himself at the heart of the lacuna. "For Kierkegaard, Christianity is dead", Vahanian alleges, "so dead that Kierkegaard would not call himself a Christian."³⁶⁷

Yet this assumption seems to base itself on a conflation of 'Christianity' and 'Christendom' in Kierkegaard's thought – two ideas between which there is an absolute difference. "Christendom is...the betrayal of Christianity."³⁶⁸ In fact as Kierkegaard states explicitly, "I believe it is an overstatement to say that Christianity in our time has been completely abolished. No, Christianity is still present and in its truth, but as a *teaching*, as *doctrine*. What has been abolished and forgotten, however (and this can be said without exaggeration), is *existing as a Christian*".³⁶⁹ Kierkegaard detected a more insidious and covert atheism in the inauthentic theatre of the Danish bourgeois Church. In a world where being born a Christian was synonymous with being born a Dane, Kierkegaard strove to reintroduce Christianity into Christendom.³⁷⁰ Furthermore, Kierkegaard's reluctance in identifying himself as a Christian was not due so much to the decay of Christianity as the rigorous height at which he esteemed its authentic expression. His position was one to which he attached the military phrase "armed neutrality": "Naturally, it [the phrase "armed neutrality"] cannot mean that I want to leave undecided the question of whether or not I myself am a Christian, am pursuing it, fighting for it, praying about it, and hoping before God that I am that. What I have wanted to *prevent* and want to

and Kierkegaard on the Self', *Journal of Religion*, Volume 56 (1976), 356. However, the crucial distinction is that while Feuerbach subsumes theology under the self, Kierkegaard perceives that the self can only become itself before God as initially Wholly Other.

³⁶⁵ Vahanian, *The Death of God*, 230-1

³⁶⁶ *The Death of God*, 210

³⁶⁷ Vahanian, *The Death of God*, 210

³⁶⁸ 'The Fatherland', March 30, 1855, AUC, 37

³⁶⁹ *Armed Neutrality and An Open Letter*, 34.

³⁷⁰ Kierkegaard's modern problem, it should be noted, was not entirely a new problem. As Stephen Crites explains, the institutionalisation of Christianity has, from its Constantinian inception, always appeared incommensurable to some Christians. "It is, to be sure, no accident that this wedding of church to empire coincided almost exactly with the first strong impetus of the monastic movement: only when 'the world' professed Christianity did large numbers of earnest Christians find it necessary to separate themselves off from it, and from the main body of the church as well." *In the Twilight of Christendom*, 17. However, Kierkegaard's writings reveal a thoroughly Protestant suspicion towards the evasions implicit in the flight from world to monastery. He is interested in what it means to be a

prevent now is any sort of impression that I am a Christian to any extraordinary degree, a remarkable kind of Christian.”³⁷¹

It is often supposed that Kierkegaard prompted a style of ‘modern theology’ in response to the capitulation of Christendom, but one also founded, as Altizer claims, “more deeply in response to the advent of a reality that was wholly divorced from the world of faith, or, as Kierkegaard saw, a reality that was created by the negation of faith.”³⁷² Altizer alleges that, “Kierkegaard knew the death of God only as an objective reality; indeed, it was ‘objectivity’ that was created by the death of God... But in Kierkegaard’s time the death of God had not yet become a subjective reality.”³⁷³ For Kierkegaard, the inner life of faith as subjectivity consolidated itself against a nineteenth century culture of increasing divine absence. Although facing extinction in the world, it was still possible for God to take refuge in the hearts of individuals. It is an inner life which derived significant invigorating dialectical tension from an understanding of God as ‘Wholly Other’: a faith which testifies to the opposition of God to the world. It is precisely this enmity which Christendom had forgotten: “God is man’s most redoubtable enemy, thy mortal enemy; He would that thou shouldst die, die unto the world, He hates precisely that wherein thou naturally hast thy life, to which thou dost cling with all thy joy in living.”³⁷⁴

According to Altizer, however, whilst ‘faith as subjectivity’ was feasible in Kierkegaard’s time, it is no longer credible in the recent climate of the full incarnation of God’s death. Much of the tension of subjectivity has been dispelled. As Alasdair MacIntyre explains, the self-consciously polemical atheism of the nineteenth and early twentieth century has increasingly deferred to the figure of “the secularized unbeliever, who sees no point in actually denying the existence of God because he never saw any point in affirming it in the first place.”³⁷⁵ As such, much of the dialectical vitality of faith as subjectivity is extinguished as, in Altizer’s terms, the ‘death of God’ also becomes increasingly a subjective as well as objective reality. Consequently, Christendom *has* actually been demystified – though not quite as Kierkegaard would have envisaged. This separation of Christianity from ‘world’ occurs more from the culminated process of secularisation which Kierkegaard discerned than from the kind of dialectical awakening from this process of decline that he himself sought to provoke. The secularism that in Kierkegaard’s day was not conscious of itself as such, today sees little reason to question itself as such. But what becomes of Christianity now that Christendom has been abolished in the very secularism Kierkegaard urged it to resist? Perhaps surprisingly, as Harvey Cox explains, “the process of secularization in Europe has alleviated Kierkegaard’s problem... More and more, ‘being a Christian’ is a conscious choice rather than a matter of birth or inertia. The change can hardly be viewed as unfortunate.”³⁷⁶ In other words, secularisation evacuates Christianity to the periphery where, at least in its most Kierkegaardian theology, it is most comfortable and incisive. Perhaps the twist in the

Christian in modernity: the modern world must itself be recognised as a sufficient desert of temptation which must be confronted.

³⁷¹ AN, 33

³⁷² Altizer, ‘Theology and the Death of God’, *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, 102-3

³⁷³ Altizer, ‘Theology and the Death of God’, 104

³⁷⁴ ‘The Instant’, No. 5, July 27, 1855, AUC, 157

³⁷⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘The Debate About God’, *The Religious Significance of Atheism*, 15

³⁷⁶ *The Secular City*, 104

tale is that Kierkegaard has been revealed as some kind of ironic prophet. Christendom has died, and so Christianity lives.

While the ‘otherness’ of Christianity alleviates to some extent Kierkegaard’s problem of ‘becoming a Christian in Christendom’, the subjective tension of the choice of ‘becoming a Christian in the world’, of the dilemma between ‘spirit’ and ‘spiritlessness’, still persists since: “Every creature is at its best in its own element, can properly live in its own element, the fish cannot live on the land, nor the bird in the water - and to require spirit to live in the environment of spiritlessness means death”.³⁷⁷ The imagery employed here in ‘The Midnight Cry’ is reminiscent of Johannes Climacus’s descriptions of ‘spiritual trial’ [*Anfægtelse*] in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. In this account, the infinite qualitative difference is perceived with such horror that the person before God is like a fish trapped on dry land, or a bird caught in a cage.³⁷⁸ Such Lutheran *Anfechtung* is just what Cupitt has called the “spiritually crushing *over-againstness*”³⁷⁹ of the Wholly Other God which for many constitutes sufficient reason to also embrace the ‘death of God’ as *subjectivity*.

However, I shall contend that this spiritually crushing view of God as Wholly Other should not finally be taken for the God who is spoken of in Kierkegaard’s writings. In fact, Kierkegaard’s writings, while taking the reader to the very brink of this abyss, precisely recoil from the vision of God as “infinitely sublime [*uendelig ophøiet*]” – recalling the earlier important “SUBDIVSIO” of the God-relationship. Nevertheless, it has been alleged that to be in a Kierkegaardian relation to God inevitably means to be just such an irremediably Unhappy Consciousness, mutually alienated from the world as well as from the Wholly Other. As such, Sartre describes Kierkegaard as the “martyr of interiority”³⁸⁰ who, “whatever he did, acted within the limits of what Hegel had called the unhappy consciousness”.³⁸¹ Indeed, Kierkegaard’s writings do apparently give the reader many opportunities for concluding that faith as subjectivity entails nothing but an alienating and archaic ‘fear of the Lord’. Such, according to Friedman, is the exalted subjectivity of the Abrahamic ‘Knight of Faith’ in *Fear and Trembling* – someone who by forsaking creation in order to follow the voice of the Wholly Other, also “bears witness to the ‘death of God’”:

Kierkegaard’s ‘knight of faith’ must choose *between* God and creation. He rejects society and culture for the lonely relationship of the ‘Single One’ to God, thereby losing any check on the reality of the voice that addresses him. In its very affirmation of faith, as a result, Kierkegaard’s concept of the ‘knight of faith’ is a consequence and an expression of the ‘death of God’: it entails the loss of faith in the universal order and in the society that purports to be founded on it; the rejection of creation – the world and society – as an obstacle to the relationship with God; and the paradoxical ‘leap of faith’ that is necessary to attain any sort of contact with God.³⁸²

³⁷⁷ ‘The Midnight Cry’, April 9, 1855, AUC, 65

³⁷⁸ CUP, 432

³⁷⁹ Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God*, 8

³⁸⁰ Sartre, ‘Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal’, ed. Harold Bloom, *Modern Critical Views: Søren Kierkegaard*, 75 [originally from Sartre’s *Existentialism and Marxism*]

³⁸¹ ‘Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal’, 77

³⁸² Friedman, *Problematic Rebel*, 457

Such is the vision of an arcane Kierkegaardian subjectivity which also alarmed Buber; what he called Kierkegaard's "religious doctrine of loneliness".³⁸³ The authentic God-relation, Buber counters, must not demand the self-alienation of the 'Single One' through subjectivity's renunciation of the other: "Creation is not a hurdle on the road to God, it is the road itself."³⁸⁴ But to read the Abraham of Johannes de Silentio as Hegel's Abrahamic 'Unhappy Consciousness' is to overlook the exceptional singularity of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*. The immensity of Abraham's temptation depends upon the esteem for the universal. Furthermore, if the universal was irrevocably renounced by the God relationship then Abraham would *never* have returned to it. The point is that God's command to sacrifice Isaac is a *suspension* of the ethical and not its irreversible nihilation. Abraham experiences a 'repetition' in which the universal order is restored and transfigured. "By faith Abraham did not renounce his claim upon Isaac, but by faith he got Isaac."³⁸⁵ Abraham returns to creation. If God is *irremediably* Wholly Other then one is irrevocably consigned to the Unhappy Consciousness: a permanently alienated fugitive even from the consummation of the God-relationship. The Unhappy Consciousness is a perpetual longing after absence. Here we are returned to the abyss in which faith can be nothing but despair. But, Silentio implores, "really this is not faith but the furthest possibility of faith which has a presentiment of its object at the extremest limit of the horizon, yet is separated from it by a yawning abyss within which despair carries on its game."³⁸⁶ The irremediably estranged faith of the Unhappy Consciousness is surely implicitly impeached by Silentio's pronouncement that "Abraham believed, and believed for this life... Abraham's faith was not of this sort"³⁸⁷

And yet there is undeniably something resembling the Unhappy Consciousness in this faith – something analogous to the religious melancholy which is discussed in the next chapter. Abraham, for this moment, does walk a higher path – though he does not for this reason disdain the universal in his passion for the estrangement of pursuing the absolute. The Knight of Faith "knows that it is beautiful to be born as the individual who has the universal as his home... But he knows also that higher than that there winds a solitary path, narrow and steep; he knows that it is terrible to be born outside the universal, to walk without meeting a single traveller."³⁸⁸ There is another reason why the Knight of Faith must take a path which winds solitary, narrow, steep, and otherwise than the universal. This reason is that this is where God can be found, not because God has chosen transcendence, but because God has allowed Godself to be evacuated. This is a reason which again suggests the death of God. It is in this sense that Levinas calls Kierkegaard's God a "persecuted truth"³⁸⁹: a God exiled by that thought which renders the divine incommensurable with human reason. In this sense, God's otherness is also inversely the result of God's evacuation from the world and it is as the hidden other, the crucified paradox, that God calls humanity to relation. As such, the 'death of God' is itself responsible for this God appearing as other than the world because the world regards a living God – a living God who asks

³⁸³ 'The Question to the Single One', ed. Daniel W. Conway with K. E. Gover, *Søren Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers Volume III Philosophy of Religion*, 41 [originally appeared in Buber's *Between Man and Man*]

³⁸⁴ Buber, 'The Question to the Single One', 39

³⁸⁵ FT, 40

³⁸⁶ FT, 15

³⁸⁷ FT, 15. See Chapter Four below.

³⁸⁸ FT, 66

such things of faith – to be anathema. As such, God calls the Knight of Faith out of the universal and into what Sylviane Agacinski identifies as an “*aparté*” – an *aside* with God. Therefore, Agacinski suggests, “The relation to God is a *secret* link... The relation to God that takes place in silence and darkness is *the most difficult attachment*.”³⁹⁰ And one senses that Kierkegaard and his pseudonymous conspirators would have it no other way than as *difficult*. But this secrecy is not first of all hermetic, mystical, or occult. It is not a secret for all but the initiate because it is a secret openly offered to every ‘single one’. It is the secret of the Wholly Other. The God who emerges from the tomb must, to an extent, appear in secret because the world will not believe in the resurrection of the one whom it has named among the dead.

The Wholly Other: *Alterity* and Estrangement

It is just this *secrecy* of the Abrahamic God-relationship that allures Jacques Derrida in his consideration of *Fear and Trembling*. “Abraham himself is in secret, cut off both from man and from God.”³⁹¹ Here Derrida reproduces something apparently similar to the Hegelian alienation of the Hebraic consciousness: what he calls “the still Jewish experience of a secret, hidden, separate, absent, or mysterious God, the one who decides, without revealing his reasons, to demand of Abraham that most cruel, impossible, and untenable gesture: to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. All that goes on in secret. God keeps silent about his reasons.”³⁹² Derrida commences his discussion of *Fear and Trembling* with some reflections upon what he calls the “*Mysterium tremendum*. A frightful mystery, a secret to make you tremble.”³⁹³ Derrida apparently describes the *mysterium tremendum* in initially voyeuristic terms: the shudder of the one who is looked at yet “doesn’t see what is looking at me.”³⁹⁴ His contemplation of the trembling before the *mysterium tremendum* is expressed in language which would not be out of place in a discussion of *Anfechtung*: “We fear and tremble because we are already in the hands of God... and under the gaze of God, whom we don’t see and whose will we cannot know”³⁹⁵

These invocations of the *mysterium tremendum* are reminiscent of Rudolf Otto’s definitive consideration of the ‘numinous’ as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* in his work *The Idea of the Holy* (*Das Heilige*). Yet there is little of Otto’s *fascinans* apparent as Derrida reveals his essential concern to be the secret [*le secret*] as “the *mysterium tremendum*: the terrifying mystery, the dread, the fear and trembling of the Christian before the sacrificial gift”, considered earlier in the work in relation to Jan Patočka’s *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History*.³⁹⁶ Yet Derrida’s invocation once again recalls

³⁸⁹ ‘Enigma and Phenomena’, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 71

³⁹⁰ *Aparté: Conceptions and Deaths of Søren Kierkegaard*, 92

³⁹¹ ‘Whom to Give to (Knowing Not to Know)’, *The Gift of Death*, 79

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 57-58

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 53

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 56

³⁹⁶ Patočka is cited as talking about “a supreme, absolute and inaccessible being who holds us in his hand not by exterior but by interior force.” ‘Secrets of European Philosophy’, *The Gift of Death*, 6. Later Derrida adds, “The dissymetry of the gaze, this disproportion that relates me, and whatever concerns me to a gaze that I don’t see and that remains secret from me although it commands me, is, according to Patočka, what is identified in Christian mystery as the frightening, terrifying mystery, the

Otto's category of the *mysterium tremendum* insofar as Derrida's consideration proceeds to the 'wholly other' [*tout autre*] – a term Otto also applies to the *mysterium* as "*das Ganz andere*". Derrida's attention, though, is not so much the numinous in its *fascinans* as the notion of the secrecy implicit in *alterity* itself. As such, the *mysterium* is here closer to what Otto identifies as the "purely natural" rather than the "religious sense". As Otto distinguishes:

Taken, indeed, in its purely natural sense, 'mysterium' would first mean merely a secret or a mystery in the sense of that which is alien to us, uncomprehended and unexplained... Taken in the religious sense, that which is 'mysterious' is – to give it perhaps the most striking expression – the 'wholly other' [*das Ganz andere*].... That which is beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the 'canny', and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment.³⁹⁷

Derrida makes no reference to Otto, but by applying Otto's natural and religious sense of *mysterium* I think one can begin to discern between a Derridean and Kierkegaardian sense of the Wholly Other. If one reads Derrida as concerned with something closer to what Otto describes as the "natural" than the "religious" sense of the secret or *mysterium* then one begins to gather an idea of how Derrida eventually dissolves the absolute from his reading of *Fear and Trembling*.

Although Derrida does at least initially speak of God as the absolute, it is telling that, for Derrida, God as "*wholly other* [*tout autre*]" resides in his secrecy, or rather in his withholding: "if he were to speak to us all the time without any secrets, he wouldn't be the other, we would share a type of homogeneity."³⁹⁸ If God revealed all his secrets, God would cease to be God (wholly other): something which one might say is implicit in the secret concealing of the divine name. However, Derrida gradually reveals a "homogeneity" between God's "otherness" and the "otherness of every other". Insofar as I bind myself exclusively in duty to 'the other', Derrida explains, I am implicitly forsaking my duty to the infinite number of others who I am not binding myself to (even insofar as my gift to one denies the other).³⁹⁹ "I can respond only to the one (or to the One), that is, to the other, by sacrificing the other to that one."⁴⁰⁰

It is the homogeneity of secrecy in Derrida's account which deliberately disturbs the Kierkegaardian understanding in which the absolute alone is Wholly Other and is secret in a manner which is like no other: what one might call the "religious sense" of the *mysterium*. In other words, as each is a secret to the other then, as Derrida often repeats: "every other (one) is every (bit) other [*tout autre est tout autre*]."⁴⁰¹ Each of us retains an inaccessible *alterity*: an inviolable secret. Therefore Derrida suggests that:

God, as the wholly other, is to be found everywhere there is something of the wholly other. And since each of us, everyone else, each other is infinitely other in its absolute singularity,

mysterium tremendum." (27). It is some of this sense of the *mysterium tremendum* as "the dissymmetry that exists between the divine regard that sees me, and myself, who doesn't see what is looking at me" that Derrida also discerns in *Fear and Trembling* ('Whom to Give to (Knowing Not to Know)', *The Gift of Death*, 56).

³⁹⁷ *The Idea of the Holy*, 26

³⁹⁸ 'Whom to Give to (Knowing Not to Know)', *The Gift of Death*, 57

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 68-69

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 70

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 68

inaccessible, solitary, transcendent, non-manifest, non-present to my ego... then what can be said about Abraham's relation to God can be said about my relation without relation to *every other (one) as every (bit) other* [*tout autre comme tout autre*], in particular to my neighbour or my loved one who are as inaccessible to me, as secret and transcendent as Jahweh. Every other (in the sense of each other) is every bit other (absolutely other).⁴⁰²

The Kierkegaardian 'infinite qualitative difference' is ultimately reduced to *alterity*. Every 'other' is 'wholly other'. The ramifications are, as John Caputo describes: "The name of God, of the biblical God of Abraham and Isaac, need not be God for us; it is enough for 'God' to be the name of the absolutely other... God's mind is wholly other to Abraham, as is the mind of every other, my friends and my family, who are as transcendent to me as Yahweh."⁴⁰³ From the Kierkegaardian perspective, God is 'Wholly Other' than myself, a stranger to myself as I also become a stranger to myself, due to *sin*. In the Derridean linguistic orientation, as Caputo describes, "saying 'God is wholly other' is a textual operation, a work of hyperbolic excess, that depends upon its textual, contextual base, a piece of hymnal, holy excess."⁴⁰⁴ Once captivated in this web of linguistic play, the confession of God as 'wholly other' becomes "*stricto sensu*, impossible. To say the least, God would then be wholly other than whatever is being said by saying that God is wholly other, wholly other even than God."⁴⁰⁵ In other words, the 'wholly other' multiplies itself by differentiation from even its own assertion of itself. It becomes the linguistic deferral of meaning in the name of an irreducible *alterity*. One might be forgiven for thinking that this entwines us in the linguistic web of a negative theology – though one in which, as such, the name of 'God' even subordinates to the 'wholly other'.⁴⁰⁶

In the light of this appropriation, the infinite qualitative difference – which for Johannes Climacus is *sin* – becomes merely an expression of *alterity*. As Westphal explains, for Johannes Climacus, "apart from *sin* God is not wholly other. God becomes wholly other only when the self-estrangement of fault renders God a stranger."⁴⁰⁷ The Kierkegaardian infinite qualitative difference is not simply the *alterity* that is shared between every other, but the qualitative *estrangement* of *sin*. God has become a 'stranger' and not merely an 'other like every other'. The difference is not only a "qualitative difference [*qualitativ Forskjel*]", but an "absolute [*absolut*]", "eternal [*evig*]", "essential [*væsentlig*]" and "infinite [*uendelig*]" "chasmic abyss [*svælgende Dyb*]". It is a difference – an abyss – which induces anxiety, despair, fear and trembling. Westphal therefore describes the individual's apprehension of the 'infinite qualitative difference' as a form of "ontological xenophobia" (the fear of estranged being). This dreadful *estrangement* can be overcome by the *faith* which reconciles humanity and God in "the courage to meet one who has become a stranger."⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰² *Ibid.* 78. Though note that Derrida still maintains "We are not Jahweh." (79) However, he acknowledges that "This discourse disturbs Kierkegaard's discourse on one level while at the same time reinforcing its most extreme ramifications." *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁰³ 'Instants, Secrets, and Singularities: Dealing Death in Kierkegaard and Derrida', ed. Martin J. Matušík and Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, 222

⁴⁰⁴ John D. Caputo, 'God is Wholly Other – Almost: 'Différance' and the Hyperbolic Alterity of God', *The Otherness of God*, 191

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 191

⁴⁰⁶ "On this account the Wholly Other will not manage to be the highest name of God, a divine hypernym. Instead, in an unholy reversal, *God* will be but one possible name for the Wholly Other." *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ 'Faith As The Overcoming of Ontological Xenophobia', *The Otherness of God*, 161

⁴⁰⁸ 'Faith As The Overcoming of Ontological Xenophobia', 164

However, faith does not negate the human-divine difference entirely – as if one were to become identical with God in the act of believing. “Difference is a sin – or rather: the sin is to differ,” Sylviane Agacinski describes, “man is guilty of difference.”⁴⁰⁹ But one could be misled into thinking that the *only* difference between God and humanity is *sin*. Westphal seems to say this when he says that “apart from sin God is not wholly other.” But if one reads God as ‘Wholly Other’ as the name one uses for God as the *stranger*, then one can say that once God is no longer a stranger God can then be known by another name: a name that still retains *alterity* yet which reflects the overcoming of the estrangement of sin. Faith ultimately preserves *alterity*, both human and divine, in the face-to-face relation of becoming a self *before God*. Apart from sin God is not *Wholly Other* – that is a *stranger* – but God is still *Other* than myself. For example, God as a stranger, as an unknown, confronts the reader of Genesis 32 – as Jacob wrestles with the stranger who will not disclose his name. One might call this God the Wholly Other because one has no other name for the stranger. But by even revealing Godself to be Wholly Other there is some negation of this estrangement. In the form of the stranger of Genesis 32, God is no longer inaccessible as the Wholly Other, but gives of Godself in the concession of the struggle. The faceless stranger who always lives in the infinite distance of the absolute is not the same as the stranger who crosses the chasmic abyss in order to emerge face-to-face.

It is God who reveals the infinite distance, as Johannes Climacus explains, but it is a revelation which is also the beginning of reconciling the very difference which revelation impresses upon the individual. One may call this God “the unknown [*det Ubekjendte*]” and “must first come to know that it is different from him, absolutely different from him.”⁴¹⁰ But the “absolutely different [*absolut forskjelligt*]”, like the Wholly Other, is not the last name for God. It is an anthropocentrically derived name for God since sin, “the absolute difference, must have been caused by the individual himself.”⁴¹¹ As such, the absolutely different, the Wholly Other, are names for God primarily through the consciousness of estrangement or sin. But sin cannot be the resting point for our talking of God. As Anti-Climacus explains:

Sin is the one and only predication about a human being that in no way, either *via negationis* [by denial] or *via eminentiae* [by idealisation], can be stated of God. To say of God (in the same sense as saying that he is not finite and consequently, *via negationis*, that he is infinite) that he is not a sinner is blasphemy.⁴¹²

The consciousness of sin, the ‘infinite qualitative difference’, informs us anthropocentrically about our estrangement from God. One speaks of God as ‘Wholly Other’ than oneself – though it is God who has revealed this difference to the individual. “Of course we speak only of what God is in his relation to man.”⁴¹³ Buber is right: we can do no other. However, this is not to say that it is we who have fathomed the relation. God as Wholly Other cannot solidify the self as the starting point for consciousness of

⁴⁰⁹ *Aparté*, 84

⁴¹⁰ PF, 46

⁴¹¹ PF, 47

⁴¹² SUD, 122. One may get the sense that there is a negative theology trying to break out in all this. David Law identifies that this particular passage suggests that “Kierkegaard had at least some knowledge of negative theology and was very occasionally prepared to employ it in his own works.” *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, 26

⁴¹³ Postscript, *I and Thou*, 167

God. Such a self has no such internal solidity for Kierkegaard. What God is in relation to humanity (Wholly Other; absolutely different) has been revealed by God; but if one rests with these names then the revelation has not been fully received in faith. The abyss has not been understood until it is made known how it has been crossed, just as the infinite difference can only be revealed through a revelation which itself begins to overcome the very distance it inscribes.

As the name of the Wholly Other arises in the consciousness of sin, so in the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins does another name suggest itself. Just as human sin predicates nothing of God, so God's response to sin demonstrates something which cannot be said of humanity. Anti-Climacus asserts that while God is so infinitely unlike me in my sinfulness, I am so infinitely unlike God in the forgiving of sins:

As sinner, man is separated from God by the most chasmic qualitative abyss. In turn, of course, God is separated from man by the same chasmic qualitative abyss when he forgives sins. If by some kind of reverse adjustment the divine could be shifted over to the human, there is one way in which man could never in all eternity come to be like God: in forgiving sins.⁴¹⁴

Here is a correlative to Kierkegaard's earlier DIVISIO/SUBDIVISIO: sin is the infinite abyss which separates me from God; forgiveness is the same abyss viewed from the other side. The abyss can only be faithfully anatomised once both sides of the severance are made known – though we begin from the only side of the severance which accommodates us.

I shall suggest, therefore, that the 'Wholly Other' cannot be the last name for God, though it is a beginning. It is at the edge, hovering over the abyss, that one must begin. And yet there is always the danger of remaining here, of capitulating down into the abyss in which the Wholly Other becomes "so infinitely sublime [*uendelig ophøiet*]" that the God-relationship appears nothing but intractable melancholy, despair, and the deepest anxiety. But the infinite chasmic abyss must be revealed, and so there must be a time in which one is not mistaken in calling God the 'Wholly Other'.

Throughout Kierkegaard's writings God is spoken of as "absolutely different [*absolut forskjelligt*]" but also more vaguely by Johannes Climacus as "the Unknown". More recently Martin J. Heineken has described the general notion of 'the Unknown' in a passage which, without making explicit reference to Johannes Climacus, is ostensibly reminiscent: "The unknown, which is really other than anything known, must come to man and disclose himself in such a way that this self-disclosure itself grants the condition and itself opens the eyes and illumines the understanding."⁴¹⁵ Heineken proceeds to identify what is commonly referred to as 'the Unknown', not with Kierkegaard, but with Otto's *mysterium tremendum*.⁴¹⁶ However, it is further enticing to note that the description of God in Kierkegaard's writings as "completely other [*ganske Andet*]" finds an apparent correlative in Otto's naming of God as "the Wholly Other [*das Ganz Andere*]" who is also "*alienum*".⁴¹⁷ Yet, pursuing such terminological coincidences and affinities briefly, it is Otto's naming of "the Holy [*Das Heilige*]" which recalls the name for God in Kierkegaard's devotional writings as "the Holy One [*den*

⁴¹⁴ SUD, 122

⁴¹⁵ *The Moment Before God*, 116

⁴¹⁶ *The Moment Before God*, 107

⁴¹⁷ *The Idea of the Holy*, 26

Hellige]⁴¹⁸ – a name which suggests that ‘the Unknown’ and the ‘Wholly Other’ are not the final appellations within the God-relationship.

Adapting these designations, I shall suggest that it would be more appropriate to speak of the Kierkegaardian God-relationship in terms, not of the ‘Wholly Other’, but rather the ‘*Holy* Other’ – albeit a name which is itself open to erasure. Yet the ‘*Holy* Other’, instead of negating the ‘Wholly Other’ actually encompasses and surpasses it insofar as ‘Holy’ (deriving from the Old English *hālig*) encompasses ‘Whole’ (from the Old English *hāl* – meaning ‘healthy’). Furthermore, whilst denoting ‘completely’, ‘Holy’ also implies *alterity*. That which is ‘Holy’ is relationally *other*: it is set apart from the profane in relation to God.⁴¹⁹ Despite recent attempts to conceive ‘Wholly Other’ in terms of sheer *alterity*, I suggest that God as ‘Wholly Other’ implies the ‘infinite qualitative difference’ of divine-human estrangement. Yet when the self, becoming itself before God, perceives itself through the eyes of God as forgiven, the ‘Wholly Other’ becomes the ‘*Holy* Other’. God as ‘Wholly Other’ begins from myself and asserts sin. God as ‘*Holy* Other’ is that which overcomes the estrangement of the ‘infinite qualitative difference’ of sin and asserts a forgiveness which communicates a relation. It announces: ‘Be holy as I am Holy’ (Leviticus 11:44).

However, this is not to say that human-divine *alterity* is annihilated in ‘oneness’. God’s overcoming of the ‘infinite qualitative difference’ does not represent mystical or ontological fusion, but an overcoming of estrangement.⁴²⁰ One must, as Westphal implores, meet the God ‘who has become a stranger’. The *Holy* Other, as such, is still the ‘Other’, and as the ‘Other’ – as *mysterium* – will always elude the self’s possession or identification. And just as God remains the ‘Other’ so Kierkegaard’s writings are interested in how one becomes oneself before God, *coram Deo*, in the dreadful and loving epiphany of the face-to-face. This, as I shall propose, takes the individual through the dark night of melancholy, anxiety, *Anfechtung*, and despair. And it is in the depths of this night that the self discovers its annihilation and transmutation – the triumph of divine forgiveness over impossibility: the impossibility of knowing oneself, ingrained in the impossibility of knowing God, entangled in the impossibility of overcoming the infinite abyss (sin). The strenuous impossibility of the task is the *metanoia* which enables the self to see itself from the other side of a seemingly abyssal and endless night – through the eyes of the *Holy* Other. And so the self must initially come to terms with the estrangement of its Unhappy Consciousness: its sense of melancholy over the impossibility of knowing a God and a self that continue to elude the consummation of the understanding.

The only legitimate tears are those cried over oneself. Praised be the one who can say:
Myself – that is the only object I have found worthy enough – or wretched enough – to cry
over.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁸ E.g. UDVS, 285

⁴¹⁹ See also Melissa Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Idea of the Holy*, 26 and 37.

⁴²⁰ As Law points out, “Kierkegaard rejects the idea of mystic union. There is no idea in Kierkegaard’s works of the individual being absorbed into the Godhead... for Kierkegaard God is and will always remain beyond our grasp.” *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, 214. For this reason Law claims that Kierkegaard can be understood as a negative theologian who is actually “*more apophatic* than the negative theologians.” *Ibid.*, 34. Yet the very fact that Kierkegaard denies the mystical union present in the *apophatic* tradition (defined by the possibility of *cataphasis*) would surely deny any identification of Kierkegaard as adhering to the neoplatonic tradition of negative theology.

⁴²¹ JP 4:3901 / Pap. X² A 87

Chapter Two: The Abyss of Melancholy

I was flung down into the abyss of melancholy...⁴²²

But even if the universe were to crush him, man would still be nobler than his slayer, because he knows that he is dying and the advantage the universe has over him. The universe knows nothing of this. – Pascal, *Pensées*⁴²³

In the previous chapter it has been claimed that the emergence of the ‘self’ in modernity occurs against a backdrop of loss. The human subject consolidates its loss of metaphysical ground [*grund*] through withdrawal into introspection – a self-reflection collapsing into its own abyss [*Afgrund*]. Man, Foucault therefore wagers, is destined to be “erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.”⁴²⁴ And the sea itself is – at the risk of assimilating metaphors – ebbing like ‘the Sea of Faith’: “Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar / Retreating, to the breath / Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear / and naked shingles of the world.”⁴²⁵ The notion is that whilst the melancholy of modernity originates in the apparent loss of God, its consummation is discovered in the apparent loss of self. The melancholy of the absence of God is both a symptom and a cause of the modern turn towards a selfhood which inevitably transpires as unobtainable. As Harvie Ferguson writes, “Melancholy sets in motion, through the deepening self-awareness implied in the failure of distraction to cure us of unhappiness, the specifically modern longing for authentic selfhood.”⁴²⁶ But this is a longing which melancholy alone is destined to be unable to fulfil. As such, I shall suggest that melancholy plays an important instructive role, for Kierkegaard especially, in the rise of self-consciousness; and also at the same time in inscribing the failure to authenticate the very self which promises the alleviation of melancholy. Melancholy, especially in its religious orientation, is thus diagnosed as a response to various forms of the modern abyss. But in coming to terms with the place of religious melancholy in modernity, it is important firstly to say something about a genealogy of melancholy itself.

A Genealogy of Melancholy: Meaninglessness and The Longing For Meaning

The tower of Babel never yielded such confusion of tongues, as the chaos of melancholy doth variety of symptoms.⁴²⁷

Antonio: Because you would not seem to appear to th’ world
Puffed up with your preferment, you continue
This out of fashion melancholy; leave it, leave it.
– John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi* (Act II, Scene I, 87-89)

Melancholy’s classical genealogy derives its formulation under the influence of Pythagorean pathology. Etymologically, *melancholy* [Greek *melancholiā*: -*melās*, -*ānos*, ‘black’, *cholē*, ‘bile’] was believed to derive from an excess of ‘black bile’ (possibly secreted from the liver) which, due to a resulting physiological imbalance, cultivated a psychological condition of depression, dejection or

⁴²² *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. and trans. Alexander Dru (754) / Pap. VIII A 650

⁴²³ XV 200, p.95

⁴²⁴ *The Order of Things*, 387

⁴²⁵ Matthew Arnold, ‘Dover Beach’, II, 25-28. Cited in Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 409

⁴²⁶ *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity: Søren Kierkegaard’s Religious Psychology*, 30

⁴²⁷ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part I, Section 3, Member I, Subsection 3, p.397

pensiveness. Harmonious levels of 'black bile' were ideally maintained in equilibrium with the three other bodily fluids: yellow/red bile, blood and phlegm. Health was conceived in terms of the balance and composure of the four bodily fluids – a balance rudimentary to the medical theory of the second century Greek anatomist Galen of Pergamum. In the physiology of Galen's *Prognosis* the four bodily fluids (yellow bile, blood, phlegm, black bile) corresponded to the four elements (fire, earth, water, air) and the four Hippocratic qualities (hot, cold, moist, dry).⁴²⁸ Under this structure, illness "was conceived as the excess of one humour (*chymoi*: juice or flavour) over the others."⁴²⁹ It was, Judith Perkins argues, Galen's direction towards the possibility of knowing the interior of the body – the mental self as well as the physical self – which "helped set the course for an inner-directed, reflexive 'self'."⁴³⁰ As such, the diagnosis of melancholy plays a decisive role in the turn towards introspection and thus the formation of the modern subject.

Abstracted from Hippocratic medical theory, however, modern melancholy has become increasingly remote from its elemental associations as 'earth' and physiological origins as 'black bile'. In modern attempts to define melancholy, Ferguson writes, "two apparently unconnected formulations have become canonical; melancholy is both 'sorrow without cause' and 'loss of being'."⁴³¹ Yet, the elusiveness of material cause and definition of melancholy becomes an expression of the dissolution of meaning inherent to melancholy itself. In renunciation of any systematic pathology, any anatomist of modern melancholy is forced to rely upon a more confessional approach – but a confession itself suffused by the melancholy elusiveness of the self. 'A's' rumination exemplifies the melancholic condition of the modern subject that "One ought to be a mystery, not only to others, but also to one's self."⁴³²

While classical physiological approach to melancholy has waned, melancholy's elemental associations have endured, at least analogously. Bound to the element of 'earth', melancholy suggested being weighed down or pulled down to the ground by the gravity of an internalised burden. Despite the decline of an elemental perspective in pathology, the brooding sense of 'earthiness', or heaviness persists in a more metaphorical nuance. Such an association abides in 'A's' poetic description:

My soul is so heavy that thought can no more sustain it, no wing beat lift it up into the ether. If it moves, it sweeps along the ground like the low flight of birds when a thunderstorm is approaching. Over my inmost being there broods a depression, an anxiety that presages an earthquake.⁴³³

Despite the evident internalisation of melancholy's iconography, there remains an significant exterior relation in which melancholy apparently infects and transfigures external existence. In the aesthetics of Romanticism – of which 'A' is a connoisseur – melancholy can emerge as "a quality of landscape".⁴³⁴ Transfigured by the gaze of melancholy, such a space appears possessed by its own memory, as if

⁴²⁸ See Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 152

⁴²⁹ Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, 7

⁴³⁰ *The Suffering Self*, 150

⁴³¹ *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, 'Introduction', xvi

⁴³² E/O I, 21

⁴³³ E/O I, 23

organically haunted by itself. In such a Romantic meditation, Kierkegaard describes his experience of the melancholic energy of a gravesite: "Upon entering the site of the burial mound, a certain melancholy mood comes over one, evoked by the strange mysteriousness, by the dark side that superstition carries with it."⁴³⁵ Such Romantic and elegiac sites likewise evoke the sublime, according to Kant: "Tall oaks and lonely shadows in a sacred grove are sublime... Night is sublime, day is beautiful. Temperaments that possess a feeling for the sublime are drawn gradually, by the quiet stillness of a summer evening as the shimmering light of the stars breaks through the brown shadows of night and the lonely moon rises into view, into high feelings of friendship, of disdain for the world, of eternity."⁴³⁶ And such a sense of the sublime is, Kant suggests, "sometimes accompanied with a certain dread, or melancholy".⁴³⁷ Indeed one who is moved towards melancholy "has above all a *feeling for the sublime*."⁴³⁸ But – as with Kant's conclusions about the sublime⁴³⁹ – melancholy essentially resides within the subject and the subject's relation to that which it gazes upon. In this sense, "Melancholy is objectless"⁴⁴⁰ – though in meditating upon itself and in failing to derive fulfilment in any object, melancholy becomes, as it were, its own unsettling object. Loss does not reside in the landscape itself, but in the self's sense of estrangement from the mysterious decadence of nature. Melancholy is, as George Pattison deduces, "the consciousness of absence, incompleteness or loss."⁴⁴¹

Max Pensy discerns that, "Like baroque dramatists, Kierkegaard's melancholy arises from the creative production of images of meaningless or dead nature, conjured up from the depths of alienated subjectivity in its desperate attempts to fill up and deny the abyssal vision of a meaningless existence."⁴⁴² Furthermore, this sense of alienated loss is not confined to the world of nature. The melancholic, in virtue of a sense of estrangement, is essentially an outsider – not only to creation, but to the culture upon which much modern disillusionment is focused. Pensy thus observes that "a melancholy world is only a world awaiting its own parody",⁴⁴³ and as Colin Wilson explains, "Outsiders are a symptom of a dying culture... Society *always* begins to die from the head downward."⁴⁴⁴ Kierkegaard himself lamented the fact that in his era "people do not seem to have a Socratic fear of being deceived",⁴⁴⁵ and, as such, were deficient in the depth of disillusionment and suspicion that can initiate the search for true meaning. Since the sensed decadence of insensate existence is dissipated in 'the crowd', melancholy inevitably becomes the lonely experience of 'the

⁴³⁴ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, 52. "...as in Kierkegaard's description of Gurre Lake, a lake gradually being overgrown by rushes: 'Here around Lake Gurre, there rests a quiet melancholy; the region lives, so to speak more in the past.' (JP, 5095/I A 64)."

⁴³⁵ Pap. I A 63

⁴³⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, 47

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 47

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 64

⁴³⁹ See Chapter Four below.

⁴⁴⁰ *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, 229

⁴⁴¹ *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, 52

⁴⁴² Max Pensy, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning Melancholy*, 142

⁴⁴³ *Melancholy Dialectics*, 4

⁴⁴⁴ *Religion and the Rebel*, 132

⁴⁴⁵ TA, 10

solitary one'. "The present age", Kierkegaard declared, is "a sensible, reflecting age, devoid of passion, flaring up in superficial, short-lived enthusiasm and prudentially relaxing in indolence."⁴⁴⁶

This melancholy perception of loss implies a certain decadent impression of historical decline. Yet Adorno argues that the "inner history of melancholy, just like that of subjectivity altogether, is conceived by Kierkegaard without any regard for external history."⁴⁴⁷ But this need not mean that external history is lost, but rather that it is captured in the internalised abyss of inwardness. "Inwardness is the historical prison of primordial human nature...the movement of melancholy is one toward the deliverance of lost 'meaning'."⁴⁴⁸ Furthermore, this nostalgia for lost meaning causes the daily life of the temporal to be incapacitated by inertia: "Time stands still, and I with it",⁴⁴⁹ Kierkegaard's melancholic 'A' writes. The temporal becomes experienced as boredom abstracted from any meaningful transcendent history. This inertia may be symptomatic of the western "nostalgia for being, the double nostalgia for earth and for heaven, for creation and for the creator."⁴⁵⁰

It is this nostalgia for transcendent meaning which manifests the dialectic of melancholy's most desolate and most resilient facets. It is in this sense that "Melancholy, paradoxically, is the disillusionment which prevents the complete triumph of disillusionment."⁴⁵¹ At this point there is an implicit metaphysics of melancholy expressed as a sorrowing over 'things as they appear', aggravated by a longing for 'things as they should be'. This hope in transcendence is evident, for example, in the melancholy which characterised Leo Tolstoy's conversion: "I was afraid of life and strove against it, yet I still hoped for something from it."⁴⁵² Such transcendental longing, however, need not imply an exclusively 'religious' element in all melancholy. Although Tolstoy identifies his sickness as a

⁴⁴⁶ TA, 68

⁴⁴⁷ Kierkegaard: *Construction of the Aesthetic*, 59

⁴⁴⁸ Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, 60

⁴⁴⁹ E/O I, 20

⁴⁵⁰ Harper, *The Seventh Solitude*, 112. For Platonism, this constituted the retrospective longing for the pre-existent ideal forms. But this consciousness evades the bitterest depths of melancholy, since 'Recollection' – through rational exertion – is the universally available means of achieving salvation from metaphysical alienation. For Kierkegaard, however, 'Recollection' is opposed by the possibility, or the impossibility of 'Repetition'. Therefore Kierkegaard, according to Wolf Lepenies, "insisted on the special temporal reference of boredom and drew the connection between the concept of melancholy and his category of repetition." *Melancholy and Society*, 88. Constantine Constantius describes how "Repetition and recollection are the same movement, only in opposite directions; for what is recollection has been, is repeated backwards, whereas repetition properly so called is recollected forwards." (R, 33) 'Repetition' is therefore modern philosophy's melancholy equivalent for the Greek concept of 'recollection', except that 'Repetition' 'anticipates' itself rather than 'returns' to itself. Melancholically understood, 'Repetition' is the inevitability of recurrence (hence boredom), or the disheartening failure of recreation (hence inconsistency and meaninglessness). For example, Constantine Constantius attempts to recreate a trip to Berlin whereby he lodges in the same place and visits the same theatre. Yet this attempt at 'Repetition' rather reinforces the disappointing impossibility of 'Repetition': the experience can never be the same. Here is one vital sense in which, without recourse to the Platonic resolution of 'recollection', "The melancholy of modern life is not the same as premodern melancholy... it cannot be overcome by rational, or at least deliberative, action because 'reason' and 'deliberation' are themselves suffused with its mournful indifference." Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, 231

⁴⁵¹ Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, 'Introduction', xvii

⁴⁵² *A Confession and Other Religious Writings*, 30

“spiritual condition,”⁴⁵³ it is worth drawing attention to William James’s observation that there “was almost no theology in [Tolstoy’s] conversion.”⁴⁵⁴

Kierkegaard finally implored God to “resolve the fundamental misery of my being.”⁴⁵⁵ But with the ‘death of God’ and the collapse of the metaphysical beyond, religiousness is no longer regarded as the inevitable cure for a disillusionment which may, in fact, remain beyond resolution. Religion has itself become a cause of intensified disillusionment for the modern individual who encounters the geometric displacement of previous centres of meaning. The premise that sorrow over existence constitutes proof that existence can, and will, be bettered has sunk in the iconoclasm of modernity. As such, Gouwen’s definition, for example, of melancholy as “the unutterable sadness that arises as a person becomes aware of his or her need for the ‘eternal’”,⁴⁵⁶ only takes us part way towards an expansive modern definition of this malady. The guarantee of metaphysical comfort has itself vanished in the twilight and the escape to transcendence becomes merely a flight to the abyss. In many ways, the solitude of the self discovering itself through the withdrawal into God has been displaced by what Harper calls “the new self-conscious solitude of those who record the absence or silence of God... To be homeless and in exile is as old and sad as the hills; to be metaphysically homeless and to care is new.”⁴⁵⁷ It is to this path of ‘metaphysical homelessness’, the loss of the created order and the related turn towards the inner abyss, that a modern consideration of religious melancholy now turns. It is here that it is hoped to reach a sense in which “Religion in modern western society is at once melancholic and the ‘cure’ for religious melancholy.”⁴⁵⁸

Divining the Signs: Inner Space and The Decline of Cosmology

As messianic expectation, melancholia gives voice to the theological promise of the redemption of the world; as the most subtle form of this hope, melancholia finds its proper home in the esoteric, since theological truths properly exist only in enciphered and distorted form, a riddled text to which melancholia dedicates itself.⁴⁵⁹

Et mon esprit, toujours du vertige hanté,
Jalouse du néant l’insensibilité.

– Ah! ne jamais sortir des Nombres at des Etres!

And my mind, always haunted by vertigo,
Is jealous of the insensibility of the void.

– Ah! I will never be free of Numbers
and Beings!

– Charles Baudelaire, ‘Le Gouffre’⁴⁶⁰

Western Christianity has traditionally evoked a long affinity with the sense of “the traditional *tristitia*, the melancholy world-view of the *homo religiosus*” – as Erikson identifies in Luther.⁴⁶¹ In a terrifying

⁴⁵³ *A Confession and other Religious Writings*, 31

⁴⁵⁴ *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lecture X, 246 n.1

⁴⁵⁵ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (754) / Pap. VIII A 650

⁴⁵⁶ *Kierkegaard As Religious Thinker*, 80

⁴⁵⁷ *The Seventh Solitude*, 5

⁴⁵⁸ Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, ‘Introduction’, xvii

⁴⁵⁹ Max Pensy, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 146

⁴⁶⁰ *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, 114

⁴⁶¹ Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther*, 37. Although “in his depressed moods he [Luther] displayed at times what we would call the clinical picture of melancholia” (Ibid., 37), Erikson observes that ultimately Luther “was not able in the long run to embrace the monastic life so natural to the traditional *tristitia*; that he mistrusted his sadness himself; and that he later abandoned this melancholic mood

world of devils, ghosts, *succubus et incubus*, Luther concluded that “All heaviness of mind and melancholy come of the devil”.⁴⁶² Struggling with his own anxiety – what he called “the devil’s bath [*balneum diaboli*]” – Luther pronounced, “’Tis a fearful thing when Satan torments the sorrowful conscience with melancholy”.⁴⁶³ Indeed, not only supernatural but also astrological forces were implicated in Luther’s appraisal of his own melancholy: “I, Martin Luther, was born under the most unfavorable of stars, probably under Saturn”.⁴⁶⁴ But these astrological superstitions – which Luther differentiated from the demonstrable proofs of astronomy – were themselves to be identified as the orchestrations of the devil rather than the divine: “Astrology is framed by the devil... to believe in the stars, or to trust thereon, or to be affrighted thereat, is idolatry, and against the first commandment.”⁴⁶⁵

Despite such indictments, the language of astrology endured beyond the Reformation rhetoric of melancholy. “Renaissance theories of melancholy reinforced the astrological aspect of traditional medicine... Some even played down or excluded the planetary influences, but even those who did so often used the same terminology.”⁴⁶⁶ In Robert Burton’s virtually canonical seventeenth century anthology *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, cosmological, or astrological, movements are identified as a cause:

I hope, I may justly conclude with Cajetan... that heaven is God’s instrument, by mediation of which He governs and disposeth these elementary bodies; or a great book, whose letters are the stars (as one calls it), wherein are written many strange things for such as can read.⁴⁶⁷

‘Sun, moon, and stars’ revolve and contrive to orchestrate a cosmic engine of alienation. A symbolic universe conspires to torment the melancholic individual. Saturn presided over melancholy, Jupiter reigned over joy. Even botanical superstition – expressing the danger of the organic contamination of madness – were customary concerns for a melancholy apothecary.

However, the *decline* of such considerations plays an decisive role in a modern development of melancholy. As the widely accepted view of the structure of the universe altered so the place of the human subject endured the turbulence of a ‘Copernican revolution’. The Neoplatonic cosmic hierarchy fragmented, bowing out to a more dispersed and elliptical vision of a universe without humanity at its centre.⁴⁶⁸ There no longer existed the previous certitude about a centred universe in which the individual could legitimately discern the arcana of an astrological symbolism. Crucially for melancholy, Ferguson explains:

The new image of the cosmos extended to human beings both a greater intimacy with, and a greater distance from, God. The earth moved, and

altogether for mood swings between depression and elation, between self-accusation and the abuse of others.” (*Ibid.*, 38)

⁴⁶² ‘Of Temptation and Tribulation’, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, DCXXXIV, 270

⁴⁶³ ‘Of the Devil and His Works’, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, DCXII, 262

⁴⁶⁴ Quoted in Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, 119

⁴⁶⁵ ‘Of Astronomy and Astrology’, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, DCCCXLIII, 343-344

⁴⁶⁶ Screech, *Montaigne and Melancholy*, 25. For example, Shakespeare: “We make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars; as if we were villains by necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion.” *King Lear*, Act I, Scene 2.

⁴⁶⁷ Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part I, Section 2, Member I, Subsection IV, p. 206

⁴⁶⁸ Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, 14

was no more or less privileged than any other heavenly body; it was, therefore, as close to God as any other point in the universe. But neither God, nor any natural body, occupied any specific 'place' in the cosmos. And because the cosmos was itself infinite, God could not be 'located' as a kind of boundary around His creation.⁴⁶⁹

The earth, let loose from the chains of Heaven, revolving around one dying star among billions, itself becomes a displaced focus of melancholy meditation. Likewise the universe, no longer reflecting Divinity, relapses into the abyss from which it came. "'Space', as pure extension, had no moral or religious connotation."⁴⁷⁰

And yet the recent cosmological discoveries of the last century have revealed the human subject to participant to an astonishing universe. The 'process' of the universe has, to an extent, renewed theological attachment to cosmology.⁴⁷¹ While astronomy has delivered sublime visions of luminous galaxies and cosmic wonders, however, recent cosmology has also revealed the inherent entropy of the process of the universe; furthermore, the recognition of infinite cosmic expansion has left our galaxy, our world, increasingly displaced and negligible. It is at this point that cosmology takes a curiously postmodern twist. Decisively, Lyotard points out, science has bequeathed to us something of a cosmic death sentence: the calculable explosion of the sun and destruction of the earth – a clinical apocalypse detached from any portentous eschatological narrative. While too remote to cause the sort of intensified apocalyptic anxiety found in Luther, this prophecy does announce the termination of life without a meaningful eschatology. Therefore this 'postmodern fable' cannot truly be called an 'apocalyptic' narrative: "The narrative of the end of the Earth is not in itself fictional, it's really rather realistic."⁴⁷² It is here that the narratives of what Lyotard terms 'postmodern fables' are differentiated from the grand narrative mythologies of longing and emancipation which typify the metaphysical appetite of modernity. The 'postmodern fable', Lyotard argues, is essentially amoral and explanatory; it is neither remedial nor legitimising. It is not mythological in the true sense since it does not tell of Gods and sons of Gods; it does not bring the ethics of heaven to rest on the earth.

But this is not to say that the postmodern is thereby absolved of melancholy. It is precisely the "lack of an eschatology" and the "contingency of the story it tells" which leaves "thought suffering for a lack of finality" in the wake of the 'postmodern fable'. And as Lyotard observes, "This suffering is the postmodern state of thought... its crisis, its malaise, or its melancholia."⁴⁷³ But this postmodern melancholia is not directed towards, or alleviated by, the modern dependence upon remedial Truth. Postmodern thought is continually aggrieved by a lack of eschatology, but this grief of postmodernity does not therefore requisition nostalgia as its cure. To long for the absent God – the *deus otiosus* – is to entrench longing in the past and to locate eschatological hope impossibly embedded in re-possessioning its

⁴⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 16

⁴⁷⁰ Ferguson, *ibid.*, 16

⁴⁷¹ The mystical meditations of the catholic scientist-priest Teilhard de Chardin are an obvious example: "All around us, Christ is physically active in order to control all things. From the ultimate vibration of the atom to the loftiest mystical contemplation." 'My Universe', ed. Ewert H. Cousins, *Process Theology*, 254

⁴⁷² Lyotard, 'A Postmodern Fable', *Postmodern Fables*, 84

⁴⁷³ 'A Postmodern Fable', *Postmodern Fables*, 100

archaeology.⁴⁷⁴ Postmodern melancholy, alternatively, testifies to a lack which is neither concluded in the resumption of the past nor the realisation of the future. As such, “every fable is melancholic, since it supplements reality.”⁴⁷⁵ By ‘supplementing’, the fable attests to a lack in reality: but a lack which, by remaining an open wound, is not fulfilled by a beyond.

This particular prediction, concerning the inevitable death of a remote star in an infinite universe, threatens to defy teleology and eschatology by brute cosmological fact. Consequently, “It could be said that the fable we heard is the most pessimistic discourse the postmodern can hold forth about itself.” Yet, for Lyotard, there is nothing recent or original about such a fable. Although it does not quite tell the story of the sky falling down, it does maintain our most recent melancholy anxiety. “It merely continues the discourses of Galileo, Darwin, Freud: man is not the centre of the world, he is not the first (but the last) among creatures, he is not the master of discourse.”⁴⁷⁶ Melancholy stands in for the now absented centre. The human subject, isolated from a solidified sense of its place in the universe, has turned towards an inner space in which the esotericism of the symbolic world is internalised. As Ferguson writes, “The Creator was removed to an infinitely remote point in space and time; and as this was no point at all He could be conceived in relation to Creation only as an eternally present but impotent deus absconditus: as the hidden god of an inner faith. And the very immediacy of this direct confrontation reduced the human person, once again, to wretchedness.”⁴⁷⁷ In the disintegration of the cartography of the self, the subject is condemned once more to vanity, boredom, solitary wandering beneath a black sun, in a now indeterminable desert. It is perhaps this image of boredom, or *acedia*, which most aptly describes the condition of the religious in melancholy’s transition to the modern.

In ancient days all paths led
Somehow to God and His Name.
We are not pious. We stay in the Profane
And where God once stood, stands: Melancholy – Gershom Scholem⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 96

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 101

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 101. Here is an intractable melancholy without a final cure. Except that, Lyotard suggests, we need not necessarily succumb to such a malaise of mourning over the loss of this grand narrative. “Lamenting the ‘loss of meaning’ in postmodernity boils down to mourning the fact that knowledge is no longer principally narrative”, Lyotard writes. “Such a reaction does not necessarily follow.” *The Postmodern Condition*, 26. Postmodern senses of loss need not seek emancipation in eschatological restoration. A multiplicity of narratives displaces the great longing for an essential Truth. In other words, “Most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative” (*Ibid.*, 41) and the concomitant melancholy which haunts it. Instead of paralysing ourselves with a melancholic nostalgia for archaic truths about the soul’s relation to the divine, it is claimed that “we must learn to speak of God godlessly and of self selflessly.” Taylor, *Deconstructing Theology*, 89. God is dead, but we must no longer consume ourselves by our melancholy love for the absent one since such a melancholy nostalgia relates itself to a now disavowed metaphysical longing. But to forsake this nostalgia in the name of the postmodern may risk closing the world off to the insights of melancholy or the aspirational drive of disillusion. “Melancholy is the shadow permanently accompanying the forward rush of the age”, George Pattison writes, “yet in fleeing this shadow it flees that which would give it the possibility of deeper insight into its own truths, limitations and possibilities.” *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture*, 21

⁴⁷⁷ *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, 17

⁴⁷⁸ Cited in Pensy, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 1

Where does this black sun come from? Out of what eerie galaxy do its invisible, lethargic rays reach me, pinning me down to the ground, to my bed, compelling me to silence, to renunciation? – Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 3

The title of Kristeva's book, *Black Sun*, invokes a familiar traditional emblem for the lethargy of melancholy: that of the burning sun which blighted the spiritual ambitions of early desert monasticism. At midday the sun – the 'noonday devil' – burns at its highest and induces apathy in the ascetic, tempting away from the religious vocation by thoughts of comfort and shelter. The sun burns angrily in its zenith and the shadows are at their shortest. As Ferguson describes, "A cold shadow falls over the hermit's soul even as the burning sun stands directly above him in the sky. The soul becomes both actually and metaphorically opaque, impenetrable to the activating radiance which was the nurturing medium of human physical and spiritual wellbeing."⁴⁷⁹ This notion of *acedia* ('without care'),⁴⁸⁰ was traditionally identified with the deadly sin of sloth – a dreadful obstacle on the path of spiritual exercise. Nowadays, Dicken observes, it is a scarcely mentioned malady – an omission which implies "a disquieting comment on the superficiality of our spiritual education."⁴⁸¹

Nevertheless, Frank Lake suggests that "under the term 'akedia' or 'accidie' [or *acedia*] clinical theologians of the past thought and wrote a great deal about what we now call depression."⁴⁸² However, it would be misleading to assert that *acedia* is a synonymous malady with melancholy. Due to its voluntary and sinful nature, the indictment of *acedia* in monastic life is often stricter in tone than more sympathetic treatments of melancholy itself. John of the Cross, for example, regarded those of "melancholy temperament" [*mal humor*] as "objects of the deepest pity" even when their affliction lends itself to terrible delusions of demonic interaction.⁴⁸³ Unlike melancholy, *acedia* was considered within the crucible of temptation rather than debilitating illness. According to John of the Cross, the melancholic who suffered under Satan's thrall required physiological, as well as spiritual, restitution.⁴⁸⁴ Such physical nurture was itself a consideration of what John saw as the 'natural accidie' of sleeplessness or dyspepsia; but it was "spiritual sloth [*acidia espiritual*]" which most grievously threatened "the way of perfection."⁴⁸⁵ While a degree of disillusion with the vanity of the world is a requisite melancholy for the monastic, this virtue of detachment, or the freedom of *apatheia*, must not

⁴⁷⁹ Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, 10

⁴⁸⁰ "Classically it is defined as 'spiritual sloth', but probably the nearest current synonym is the colloquialism 'fed-upness'." E. W. Trueman Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 251

⁴⁸¹ E. W. Trueman Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 251

⁴⁸² *Clinical Theology: A Theological and Psychiatric Basis to Clinical Pastoral Care*, 111. See Chapter 2 'The Understanding of Depressed, Melancholy or Accidious Persons'.

⁴⁸³ *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Book I, chapter iv, 6, p.20

⁴⁸⁴ "When melancholy is the occasion of these visitations of Satan, men in general cannot be delivered from them till their bodily health is improved, unless the dark night has overtaken the soul, gradually freeing it from all trouble." Book I, chapter iv, 6, p.20-21. There is an important distinction between the "dark nights" and melancholia, as Denys Turner explains: "for the one, melancholia, he assumes to have a physiological cause, the other, the spiritual condition, is brought about by God – or rather inevitably by the closeness of God to the soul." *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, 235. See further 'Chapter 10 – John of the Cross: the dark nights and depression'.

⁴⁸⁵ *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Book I, chapter vii, 2, p.31

infect the whole of spiritual existence itself. When this occurs then inertia and “aridity” contaminates prayer – a dryness in which devotional activities become burdensome and even repugnant.

However, since the late medieval period an increasing identification of *acedia* with the sin of sloth signifies a more material and naturalised rendering of a malaise which was earlier understood spiritually. Such a transition inevitably connotes *acedia* as much with laziness as with religious disillusion. For Raposa, this fixation upon one particular outward manifestation of an inner condition constitutes “an impoverishment of the earlier conception.”⁴⁸⁶ The radical dangers of *acidia spiritual* give way to the discomforts of ‘natural accidie’. For example, Lake quotes from a reference to the ‘wise words’ of St. Seraphim:

The counsel he gave to nuns in the convent he supervised is recorded. ‘He commanded us to fear above all things, and to flee as we should from fire, the chief of sins, accidie.’ ‘There is no worse sin, my mother, and nothing more terrifying or destructive, than the sin of accidie!’ said Father Seraphim.⁴⁸⁷

Yet, while accidie is identified as “the chief of sins”, Father Seraphim encouraged his nuns to observe pragmatic preventatives such as ensuring “one always sleeps with bread under the pillow in case one awakes hungry and is visited with sorrow.”⁴⁸⁸ Accidie [or *acedia*], at least in this instance, is primarily a tangible malaise; the practical orientation of its treatment appears to differentiate it from the abstractions of a modern understanding of melancholy. This is also present in Father Evagrius of Pontus (c.345-399) who, in numbering *acedia* among the “bad thoughts”, gives the example of a monk struggling against inane distractions in the tedious exertion of reading his book in solitude.⁴⁸⁹ Evagrius, as Sorabji observes, was well aware that *acedia* often verges on “idleness (*argia*)” and in time “the concept and even the name of sloth came to replace that of depression.”⁴⁹⁰

In the seventh century, Pope Gregory the Great, translating the ‘eight bad thoughts (*logismoi*)’ of Evagrius into the ‘seven cardinal sins (*principalia vitia*)’, supplanted *acedia* with *tristitia*.⁴⁹¹ But a further reason for this lapse in modern consideration of *acedia* is surely that, as part of the vocabulary of ascetic literature, its decline in technical terminology is related to the decline of the monastic way of life. As such, in the seventeenth century Burton refers to *acedia* more imprecisely as the “idleness” which reaches beyond the exclusively monastic setting – a cause of melancholy conceived outside of the ascetic rigours of the monastery as “an appendix to nobility.”⁴⁹² Here one approaches a sense of the more modern incarnation of *acedia* as a spiritually indifferent and secularised malaise: a boredom which is found not in the monastery but in the modern city. Wolf Lepenies points out that Kierkegaard

⁴⁸⁶ See Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, 12. While Aquinas saw *acedia* as ‘sorrow for the divine good’, Raposa identifies John Cassian as largely responsible for the more superficial rendering of Evagrius’s initial teachings. As such, physical remedies (such as ascribed to Father Seraphim) became dominant. See further *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁴⁸⁷ *Clinical Theology*, 103-4

⁴⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 104

⁴⁸⁹ See Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*, 362

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 369

⁴⁹¹ See *Ibid.*, 370

“provided a surprisingly spatially related conclusion to his views on boredom.” Boredom, Lepenies suggests, inextricably encompasses “the sociological aspect.”⁴⁹³ In Kierkegaard’s time this boredom is the melancholy which accompanies the modern figure of the languid and urbane *flâneur*, as typified by Kierkegaard’s depiction of ‘The Seducer’ – as Steven Shakespeare describes – “the romantic poet, the ironist, the gentleman of leisure – roles made possible by cultural and social economic upheavals which had left their mark on the nascent bourgeoisie of the Danish capital.”⁴⁹⁴ These two apparently economically inverse lifestyles of asceticism and excess are thus both susceptible to a similar fate. Just as excessive fasting, solitude and meditation in the monastic life could lead to idleness, so too would the *flâneur*’s life of leisure and recreation succumb to inevitable boredom.

Essentially, it is when the condition persists “to the extent that the individual makes no effort to alleviate it”⁴⁹⁵ that *acedia* becomes spiritually vacuous. In fact, in modernity, many sought to cultivate the boredom of the aristocrat. Aristotle had already influentially identified the classical relation between genius and melancholy;⁴⁹⁶ and by the Renaissance France of Montaigne, for example, “Tristesse suggested noble sensitiveness; melancholy suggested genius – no wonder so many thought they were marked by it. No affectation was so widely cherished.”⁴⁹⁷ In *fin de siècle* Paris, Baudelaire likewise praised the scornful decadence of the Dandy who ‘does not speak to other people except to insult them’: “Dandyism is a setting sun; like a diminishing star, it is proud, without warmth and full of melancholy.”⁴⁹⁸

For Ferguson, “it is firstly as boredom, therefore, that melancholy makes its way into the modern world”;⁴⁹⁹ and Kierkegaard furnishes us with an outstanding case study of modern boredom in the melancholy aesthete ‘A’:

I do not care for anything. I do not care to ride, for the exercise is too violent.
I do not care to walk, walking is too strenuous. I do not care to lie down,
for I should either have to remain lying, and I do not care to do that,
or I should have to get up again, and I do not care to do that either.
Summa summarum: I do not care at all.⁵⁰⁰

To lie in bed all day, in melancholy repose, is a solitary pleasure for the leisurely melancholic; as Burton writes, “A most incomparable delight it is so to melancholize, and build castles in the air.”⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹² *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part I, Section 2, Member 2, Subsection 6, p.244

⁴⁹³ *Melancholy and Society*, 88

⁴⁹⁴ Kierkegaard, *Language and the Reality of God*, 86

⁴⁹⁵ Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, 12

⁴⁹⁶ *Problem XXX.1* “Why is it that all those who are outstanding in philosophy, poetry or the arts are melancholic?”

⁴⁹⁷ Screech, *Montaigne and Melancholy*, 23

⁴⁹⁸ ‘Le Dandy’, ‘Critical Writings’, *Les Fleurs Du Mal et Oeuvres Choises*, 192. Susan Blood writes (in reference to Sartre’s critique in his *Baudelaire*): “Baudelaire’s pretensions to originality, his cultivation of dandified manners, and his declarations of solitude all marked the painful suspicion that he was not unique after all.” Furthermore, “Baudelaire’s bad faith stemmed from this predicament: he needed others in order to become himself, and could never fully acknowledge his dependency. His claim to authenticity actually deepened his bad faith; his authenticity was undermined by its very affirmation.” (*Baudelaire and the Aesthetics of Bad Faith*, 5). Interestingly, in the second part of *Either/Or*, ‘B’ launches a similar criticism against the aesthete ‘A’: “In fact you are nothing; you are merely a relation to others, and what you are you are by virtue of this relation.” (135)

⁴⁹⁹ *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, 25

⁵⁰⁰ E/O I, 15

But for 'A', boredom even insidiously contaminates itself. Idleness becomes restlessness; existence no longer accommodates languid repose. One is delivered over to the abyss. "Boredom, extinction," as Vigilius Haufniensis contemplates, "is precisely a continuity in nothingness."⁵⁰²

And how is this alleviated? Even "Curiosity", the contemplation of which may distract one from melancholy and boredom, "is vanity", according to Pascal's conclusions.⁵⁰³ Even the enquiry into the 'self' becomes merely another vain internal curiosity. Man does not and cannot know himself:

Know then, proud man, what a paradox you are to yourself... Learn that man infinitely transcends man, hear from your master your true condition, which is unknown to you.
Listen to God.⁵⁰⁴

And yet, being unable to resolve the issues of death, God and the 'self', Pascal laments, "men have decided, in order to be happy, not to think about such things."⁵⁰⁵ But man is so essentially unhappy as to "be bored even if he had no cause for boredom... and he is so vain that, though he has a thousand and one basic reasons for being bored, the slightest thing, like pushing a ball with a billiard cue, will be enough to divert him."⁵⁰⁶

Essentially, the boredom of the modern subject does not necessarily initiate the religious. On the contrary, as Vigilius Haufniensis warns, "*The demonic is the contentless, the boring.*"⁵⁰⁷ Such is Baudelaire's confession as his melancholy leads him into a desert of apathy, away from the eyes of the divine:

Thus, far from the sight of God, he leads me,
Panting and crushed by fatigue, into the midst
Of the plains of Boredom [*ennui*], extensive and deserted...⁵⁰⁸

Boredom, seeking increasingly more exotic distraction, sinks into decadence – yet a decadence which is itself not immunised against boredom. As 'A' laments:

Wine no longer makes my heart glad; a little of it makes me sad, much
makes me melancholy... Vainly I seek to plunge myself into the boundless
sea of joy; it cannot sustain me, or rather, I cannot sustain myself.⁵⁰⁹

And so boredom gives birth to despair. "Boredom is the shadow of doubt – a doubt that can grow and grow until one despairs of one's life."⁵¹⁰ Even a life sustained by intoxication – erected as a defence against boredom – succumbs to the infection of inertia. As Jean-Luc Marion describes: "Under the black sun of vanity, nothing matters... interest itself in no way interests man; he no longer feels interested in interest, since vanity renders indifferent every difference peculiar to the world and internal

⁵⁰¹ *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part I, Section 2, Member 2, subsection 6, p. 246

⁵⁰² *The Concept of Anxiety*, 133

⁵⁰³ *Pensées*, IV, 77, p.50

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, VII, 131, p.64-65

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII, 133, p.66

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, VIII, 136, p.70

⁵⁰⁷ CA, 132

⁵⁰⁸ 'La Destruction', *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, 84. The translation of *ennui*, as Raposa suggests, is best understood as a "boredom tinged with deep melancholy." (*Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, 13)

⁵⁰⁹ E/O I, 33

⁵¹⁰ Diogenes Allen, *Three Outsiders: Pascal, Kierkegaard, Simone Weil*, 65

to it.”⁵¹¹ And so boredom reveals the abyss in which the eye of vertigo gazes upon nothing. In the words of ‘A’:

Boredom depends on the nothingness which pervades reality; it causes a dizziness like that produced by looking down into a yawning chasm, and this darkness is infinite.⁵¹²

Melancholy in the Aesthetic and the Religious

And still Raposa suggests that “Boredom can serve as midwife for the birth of religious knowledge, it is the pallid half-darkness that sometimes lingers just before the dawning of religious insight.”⁵¹³ For Kierkegaard, as for Pascal, this involves the realisation that only the divine can sever the ‘Gordian knot’ of the self’s existence and unburden melancholy from the weight and vertigo of the abyss. One may thus wish to differentiate between melancholy in the aesthetic and the religious spheres of existence. However, Kierkegaard himself makes no formal differentiation between an *aesthetic melancholy* and a *religious melancholy*. Despite this, Vincent A. McCarthy ‘loosely’ ventures such a distinction corresponding to the uses of the Danish words *Tungsind* and *Melancholi* in *Either/Or* – a work he suggests can be understood as “the ‘missing treatise’ on melancholy in Kierkegaard’s authorship.”⁵¹⁴ McCarthy suggests that both words, commonly translated by the single English word ‘melancholy’, signify two degrees of the one mood: “*Melancholi* being lighter, having a certain sweetness and the associations of passivity which the word also has in English; *Tungsind* being deeper, heavier, more intense, closer to brooding, and with an element of reflection present to it.”⁵¹⁵

McCarthy is not alone in discerning a difference between these two words: as Mark C. Taylor explains, “*Melancholi* is more light-hearted and attractive, while *Tungsind* is a darker mood that involves brooding preoccupation.”⁵¹⁶ But McCarthy makes more than a merely stylistic distinction between these terms. In contrast to the “aesthetic” *Melancholi*, McCarthy argues, *Tungsind* “is a reflective and more critical melancholy,”⁵¹⁷ and as such is suggestive of a “religious melancholy”. Yet, the distinction appears more blurred. As Taylor also notes, “The aesthetic stage on life’s way ends in what Kierkegaard calls ‘melancholy’ [*Tungsind*].”⁵¹⁸ *Tungsind* is for Taylor the climax of the aesthetic, rather than the religious. Yet, for McCarthy, *Tungsind* implies the evolution of aesthetic *Melancholi* from “the first moment of melancholy” into “the second moment” of the religious. Religious melancholy’s dependence upon aesthetic melancholy is understood in terms of *Tungsind*’s critical disillusionment with “the first moment” of *Melancholi* through which it claims to have moved beyond the aesthetic. Therefore McCarthy describes religious melancholy as “the melancholy of a subject become reflective in the wake of the failure of all finite objects to satisfy an unquenchable longing.”⁵¹⁹

⁵¹¹ Marion, *God Without Being*, 123

⁵¹² E/O I, 239

⁵¹³ Michael L. Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, 2

⁵¹⁴ McCarthy, *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*, 53

⁵¹⁵ McCarthy, *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*, 56

⁵¹⁶ *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard*, 240, n. 110

⁵¹⁷ ‘Kierkegaard’s Religious Psychology’, ed. Joseph H. Smith, *Kierkegaard’s Truth*, 254

⁵¹⁸ *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard*, 240

⁵¹⁹ ‘Kierkegaard’s Religious Psychology’, 254

Yet the distinction appears too fluid to generate an interpretative consensus. For example, McCarthy's notion of *Tungsind* as an "intensified" *Melancholi* is convincingly critiqued by Abraham Khan. According to Khan, there is insufficient evidence supporting an emphatic radical distinction between the two terms. The material "lends to an equally plausible hypothesis that 'Tungsind' is a stylistically elegant variation of 'Melancholi'."⁵²⁰ Thus Khan emphatically rejects any assertion that 'Melancholi' is the longing of aesthetes, poets and Romantics, while 'Tungsind' represents a deeper, more profound development. Instead, 'Melancholi' is a kind of irony, whilst 'Tungsind' is actually allied to desire and imagination.⁵²¹ Whilst maintaining a difference between the two, Khan is most anxious to avoid the trap of intensifying one at the expense of the other; "there is a definite difference," he asserts, "but it seems to be more a difference in kind rather than degree."⁵²²

The translation of *Tungsind* is evidently emotive in this issue. McCarthy translates *Tung*['heavy']*sind* specifically as "heavy-spirited,"⁵²³ whilst Khan claims that *sind* more loosely denotes "mind/spirit".⁵²⁴ Rendering *sind* precisely as 'spirit' implicitly conveys religious, not to mention Hegelian, connotations. If, on the contrary, *sind* is read as 'mind' or 'temperament' then a different emphasis to *Melancholi* is conveyed, without necessarily implying an awakening of 'spirit'. As such, McCarthy even acknowledges that 'spirit' is already "gestating" in *Melancholi*.⁵²⁵ Furthermore, before enforcing too technically over-determined a reading of the word, it would be wise to note Croxhall's observation that *Tungsind* "is a very common word, often used to describe the character of Jutlanders, of whom Kierkegaard's father was one. *Tungsind* means brooding rumination, ceaseless introspection, perpetual cogitation, lack of decision, and listlessness, rather than just 'listlessness'."⁵²⁶ As such, it is not necessarily an expedient trait. The suggestion that *Tungsind* denotes an awakening of 'spirit' drawing close to the religious would also seem to conflict with Anti-Climacus's words in *Practice in Christianity*: "Christianity is not at all closer to heavy-mindedness [*Tungsind*] than to light-mindedness; they are both equally worldliness, equally far away, and both have just as much need of conversion."⁵²⁷ As such, *Tungsind* is not necessarily closer to the religious than a 'light-mindedness' ('light-spiritedness' would not sound correct here). This is again present in Kierkegaard's discourse on 'The Gospel of Sufferings' where the question of bearing the burden of forgiveness of sins is discussed. To bear sins with "heavy-mindedness" is to refuse forgiveness for that which one believes is too heavy a burden to be displaced; to bear sins with "light-mindedness" is to take the forgiveness of sins too lightly – as if forgiveness itself is to be easily forgotten. "Every

⁵²⁰ Khan, 'Melancholy, Irony, and Kierkegaard', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Volume 17, 1985, p.68

⁵²¹ "Tungsind is aligned with the constant longing to eternalize, or freeze, a peak sensual experience, whereas *Melancholi* is in conformity with irony from a personal standpoint. They are essentially two different conditions of melancholy." 'Melancholy, Irony, and Kierkegaard', 78

⁵²² 'Melancholy, Irony, and Kierkegaard', 80

⁵²³ 'Kierkegaard's Religious Psychology', 254

⁵²⁴ 'Melancholy, Irony, and Kierkegaard', 75

⁵²⁵ 'Melancholy and Religious Melancholy in Kierkegaard', *Kierkegaardiana X*, 162

⁵²⁶ *Kierkegaard Commentary*, p. xv, n.2. Also cited in Grimsley, *Søren Kierkegaard and French Literature*, 166 n.2.

⁵²⁷ *Practice in Christianity*, 154

extreme, of heavy-mindedness or of light-mindedness [*Tungsind* or *Letsind*], is promptly a sign that faith is not really present.”⁵²⁸

Without subscribing to a formal identification of religious melancholy as *Tungsind* and aesthetic melancholy as *Melancholi*, however, it is still possible to affirm that melancholy directed towards the religious can be differentiated in places from a melancholy which orients itself around the aesthetic. It is through the religious that melancholy is sublimated. Once melancholy becomes conscious of a religious longing, it becomes transfigured by that longing and is restless until it finds fulfilment. This breaking through of the negative energy of melancholy towards the longing for the God-relationship may best be clarified by an examination of the sketches of melancholy which are found in Kierkegaard's authorship.

There is a difference between melancholy [*Tungsind*] and melancholy [*Tungsind*]. There is a melancholy which in the case of poets, artists, thinkers, is a crisis, and on the part of women may be an erotic crisis. So the melancholy of this lay figure of mine [Quidam] is a crisis anticipatory of the religious experience.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁸ UDVS, 246. A. S. Aldworth and W. S. Ferrie translate as “heavy-hearted or light-hearted”. *Gospel of Sufferings*, 45. However, despite these juxtapositions, it should not be assumed that heavy-mindedness and light-mindedness are mutually exclusive. For example, in the discourse ‘Against Cowardliness’ Kierkegaard writes, “Silence and light-mindedness [*Letsind*] can indeed conceal a heavy-mindedness [*Tungsind*] that gloomily loves the good.” EUD, 373-374

⁵²⁹ ‘Epistle to the Reader’, SLW, 390. I have here been using Walter Lowrie's translation since the Hong and Hong rendering of *Tungsind* as “depression” (SLW, 429) is misleading. McCarthy also notes this since ‘depression’ in the twentieth century is contaminated by specifically clinical and Freudian meanings. Furthermore, “The Danish twentieth-century term that corresponds to our use of ‘depression’ is simply the Danish cognate ‘depression.’” ‘Mourning and Melancholia in ‘Quidam's Diary’, *International Kierkegaard Commentary Volume 11: Stages on Life's Way*, ed. Robert L. Perkins, 155 n.11. However, McCarthy's own alternative advocating of the “archaic” word “melancholia” potentially suffers from a similarly technical twentieth century connotation. *Melancholia* becomes, as Abraham Khan explains, “a technical term or name for a functional mental disease characterized by gloomy thoughts, delusion, and depression. After Freud's 1917 study ‘Mourning and Melancholia,’ Karl Abraham's 1924 study on melancholia and obsessional neurosis, and Sandor Rado's 1926 paper on the problem of melancholia, the latter term gained admittance to the lexicography of clinical psychiatry as a synonym for psychotic depression.” ‘Melancholy: An Elusive Element of Depression?’, *The Journal of Medical Humanities* 15:2 (1994), 114. It has been remarked that “Kierkegaard was the first to transfer psychology from the physiological laboratory to a truly personal context... Through his writings and self-analysis, Kierkegaard preceded Freud, Jung, and Rogers on subjects such as the unconscious, introversion, and self, ideal-self conflict.” Charles Carr, ‘Kierkegaard: On Guilt’, *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Volume 1:3 (1973), 16. And yet Khan elsewhere denies an identification between Kierkegaard's *Melancholi* and Freud's *Melancholia* since, unlike Kierkegaard, “Freud's enquiry is about an illness, a condition not necessarily and deliberately willed...[Kierkegaard's] is decisively different from Freud's concern in that the experience of nothingness issues from having adopted irony as a personal standpoint or orientation in life.” ‘Melancholy, Irony, and Kierkegaard’, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 17 (1985), 72. Furthermore, as Khan also argues, in Kierkegaard, “being melancholy is a feature of our humanity and is hardly an indication of illness or psychological abnormality.” ‘Melancholy: An Elusive Dimension of Depression?’, 114. There is thus a potentially confusing slippage of Kierkegaard's and the technical term when, for example, in Bruce Kirmmse's translation of Kresten Nordentoft's *Kierkegaard's Psykologi* (Copenhagen: G. E. C. GAD, 1972) / *Kierkegaard's Psychology* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978) the more specialised “melancholia” is used throughout to translate both *Melancholi* and *Tungsind*.

La mélancholie, toujours inséparable du sentiment du beau.
– Baudelaire

How wonderfully melancholy and religion can blend together.
– Kierkegaard⁵³⁰

Kierkegaard at times reads as both modernity's greatest anatomist of melancholy and the most virile and ironic critic of both melancholy and modernity. Against the grain of secular humanism's optimistic procession from the Renaissance and contemporary neo-Stoicism, Pascal asserted that "Man's greatness comes from knowing that he is wretched."⁵³¹ Likewise, with more affinity to the self-conscious despair of Pascal than the neo-Stoical resilience of Montaigne, Kierkegaard affirmed the value of humanity's consciousness of its own deficiency.⁵³² Human greatness comes from knowing the abyss. Kierkegaard's writings anatomise an inner conflict between the aesthetic and the religious which constitutes the dialectical melancholy of the modern self. Although Kierkegaard never devoted a conceptual publication to melancholy – as he did with anxiety and despair – his writing exhibits some personal application of melancholy's tradition: "What in a certain sense is called 'spleen' and what the mystics knew by the designation 'the arid moments,' the Middle Ages knew as *acedia*".⁵³³ It is to this *tristitia* that Kierkegaard relates his father invoking "A quiet despair."⁵³⁴ Under this phrase Kierkegaard recounts a genealogy of hereditary melancholy: a father labouring under a secret melancholy; a silent confidante, his son Søren, "upon whom the whole of that melancholy descended in inheritance."⁵³⁵

It is Kierkegaard's propensity for apparently autobiographical confessions of the eternal night brooding within that has attracted much morbid and salacious speculation about the hidden etymology gnawing at the core of his 'thorn in the flesh'. But despite the silence at the heart of this wound, Camus confidently pronounces how Kierkegaard "is careful not to quiet its pain."⁵³⁶ As for St. Paul, Kierkegaard's secret thorn is a passion which dares only to speak its name obliquely; and yet,

⁵³⁰ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (905) / Pap. X¹ A 285

⁵³¹ *Pensées*, VI 114 (397), p.59

⁵³² Despite the differences between Pascal's seventeenth century France in the grip of scientific rationalism and Kierkegaard's nineteenth century Denmark in the sways of Romantic Idealism, both Pascal and Kierkegaard can be seen in reaction against certain out-workings of the Renaissance tradition. As Denzil Patrick explains, both "challenged the whole anthropology of the Renaissance, with its enthronement of self-sufficient reason, its affirmation that man is the measure of all things." *Pascal and Kierkegaard*, Vol II, 316

⁵³³ JP 1:739 / Pap. II A 484

⁵³⁴ JP 1:740 / Pap. II A 485. It is important to note that while Kierkegaard uses "despair", the diagnosis is closer at this point to a more general "melancholy" than what he later formulates as "despair." "It is not yet the formulation of an exact theological concept, which was to emerge later on when he began distinguishing between dread [anxiety] and desperation [despair], but only the 'nuclear embryo' – as it were – from which these notions derive." Cornelio Fabro, 'Desperation.' *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana* Volume 7, 132.

⁵³⁵ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (600) / Pap. VII A 126. A similar portrait is fictionalised under "Quiet Despair" in *Stages On Life's Way*, 199-200: "Poor child, you are in a quiet despair... And the father believed that he was responsible for his son's depression, and the son believed that it was he who caused his father's sorrow – but never a word was exchanged about this." SLW, 200

⁵³⁶ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 30

according to Sartre, all are agreed in diagnosing “a sexual anomaly as its kernel.”⁵³⁷ That is unless, as Rikard Magnussen speculates, one looks no further than Kierkegaard’s hunchback to unlock its secret.⁵³⁸ But all such conjecture should be moderated by Vigilius Haufniensis’s observation that “Not everyone who is stoop-shouldered is an Atlas, nor did he become such by supporting a world.”⁵³⁹ It is such speculative sculpting that forms the statue of Kierkegaard as the “angelic or demonic spirit in a sickly, hunchbacked body”.⁵⁴⁰ Hence Camus’s dandified portrait of a melancholic Kierkegaard: “That face both tender and sneering, those pirouettes followed by a cry from the heart”⁵⁴¹ Here Kierkegaard is portrayed awakening his own suffering “in the desperate joy of a man crucified and happy to be so,”⁵⁴² prolonging his passion in the hope that it would eventually reconcile him to the anomaly of his own existence.

This is an invariably unbalanced description of “the melancholy Dane in whom Hamlet was mastered by Christ”.⁵⁴³ One cannot be certain where the root of this thorn grows, but what is revealed is into which dark night Kierkegaard believed it led him and by whose light his path was illuminated. Kierkegaard’s transfigured understanding of his thorn in the flesh is more theologically availing than its conjectured psychopathology:

From an early age I have suffered from a thorn in my flesh to which the consciousness of sin and guilt has attached itself; I have felt myself to be different. This suffering, this difference I have understood as my relation to God.⁵⁴⁴

There is a sense in which Kierkegaard regarded this melancholy as inherited from his earthly father,⁵⁴⁵ yet it also derived from the relation to his Father in Heaven – “the agony with which God laid the reins

⁵³⁷ ‘Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal’, 89

⁵³⁸ As alleged in Rikard Magnussen’s, *Søren Kierkegaard set udefra* [seen from outside] and *Det saerlige Kors* [The Special Cross]. Although he was certainly “round-shouldered”, it is hard to see how Kierkegaard could have kept such a deformed hunchback a *secret* when his enemies were so keen to satirise his spindly legs and uneven trousers. See T. H. Croxall, *Kierkegaard Commentary*, p.xvi n.2. As Ronald Grimsley suggests, “a further weakness of this theory is that it does not account for the close link established by Kierkegaard himself between his secret and his relations with his father.” ‘Appendix: The Problem of Kierkegaard’s Melancholy’, *Søren Kierkegaard and French Literature*, 160. See this Appendix for a concise overview of scholarly commentaries upon the secret etymology of the thorn in the flesh. Roger Poole is likewise dubious about Magnussen’s claim in his discussion of the physicality of Kierkegaard’s ‘thorn in the flesh’ in ‘The Text of the Body’ the sixth chapter of *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication*.

⁵³⁹ CA, 7. However, it is interesting to consider Reidar Thomte’s reference to Kierkegaard’s discussion of the ‘genius’ Talleyrand (CA, 102). Talleyrand was a noble born with a clubfoot and intended for a life in the church, which he rejected. Thomte states that “Kierkegaard suggests that Talleyrand’s deformity might have been a divine sign, and that if he had disdained the temporal and immediate and had turned instead to himself and the divine, a religious genius might have emerged.” CA, 247 n.47.

⁵⁴⁰ Theodor Haecker, *Kierkegaard the Cripple*, 25

⁵⁴¹ *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 30

⁵⁴² *ibid.*

⁵⁴³ The phrase comes from P. T. Forsyth’s *The Work of Christ* and composes the title for H. V. Martin’s *Kierkegaard: The Melancholy Dane*.

⁵⁴⁴ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (1288) / Pap. X5 A 89

⁵⁴⁵ “Merciful God, my father too was terribly unjust to me in his melancholy – an old man who put the weight of his melancholy upon a child.” *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (681) / Pap. VIII A 177

upon me.”⁵⁴⁶ Although this melancholy ‘threw him for a time into sin and debauchery,’⁵⁴⁷ Kierkegaard sought to transubstantiate his existence into spirit as he came to incrementally understand God’s will for himself. Kierkegaard notes how “Empedocles supposed that there were two kinds of insanity – the one had its basis in physical illness, the other in the purification of the soul.”⁵⁴⁸ It is surely in this second basis that melancholy can derive a spiritually formative meaning. As such, “it is a fortunate, indeed it is an estimable blessing to be as melancholy as I was. Had I been a happy nature – and had then experienced what I did experience as an author; I believe it would have sent a man mad.”⁵⁴⁹ The crucible of melancholy constituted the birth pains of a spiritual metamorphosis. As such, there is a conviction in Kierkegaard that, “There is a melancholy in me which is partly, or so at least, I believe, related to something good in me”.⁵⁵⁰

It is not, however, the secret of Kierkegaard’s personal melancholia or depression which I wish to excavate. Although he confesses his illness, Kierkegaard is reticent to publish directly about the secret of his existence, preferring instead to communicate indirectly through a *dramatis personae* of pseudonyms in order to reveal, conceal and critique his own melancholy and the melancholy of the age. “In between my melancholy and myself lay a whole world of the imagination. That is, in part, what I rid myself of in the pseudonyms... my melancholy has kept me away from myself, while I discovered and practically lived through a whole world of my imagination.”⁵⁵¹ Kierkegaard’s melancholy enforced an abyss within the self within which his virile imagination spun its web. As such, while Kierkegaard privately confesses how “I was flung down into the abyss melancholy”,⁵⁵² his pseudonym Quidam recounts how he rises by virtue of his aesthetic sensibilities – “my lightness in dancing over abysses”.⁵⁵³ The aesthetic may thus constitute an evasion of melancholy’s depths – albeit an evasion which is inevitably destined to succumb to the nothingness of the abyss. What sublimates this malaise is the recognition that the latent longing of melancholy can intimate that, in Kierkegaard’s words, “Something is stirring within me which points to a metamorphosis.” The task then is not to “procure an abortion” but rather to “think out the idea of my melancholy together with God here and now. That is how I must get rid of my melancholy and bring Christianity closer to me.” It is not the ‘lightness’ which evades melancholy by ‘dancing over the abyss’; but “the need of approaching nearer to myself in a deeper sense, by approaching nearer to God in the understanding of myself.”⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁴⁶ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (600) / Pap. VII A 126

⁵⁴⁷ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (754) / Pap. VIII A 650

⁵⁴⁸ Kierkegaard refers to Heinrich Ritter, *Geschichte der Philosophie alter Zeit* [Hamburg: 1836 (ASKB 735-738)] which contains the quotation from Caelius Aurelianus’s *De morbis chronicis* (*The Time of Death*): “Empedoclem sequentes alium (sc. furorem) dicunt ex animi purgamento fieri, alium alientione mentis ex corporis causa sive iniquitate.” JP 4:3896 / Pap. VIII¹ A 47

⁵⁴⁹ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (1041) / Pap. X² A 411

⁵⁵⁰ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (1288) / Pap. X5 A 89

⁵⁵¹ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (641) / Pap. VIII A 27. Likewise pseudonym Quidam asks, “What is my sickness? Melancholy. Where is the seat of this sickness? In the power of imagination, and possibility is its nutriment.” SLW, 356

⁵⁵² *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (754) / Pap. VIII A 650

⁵⁵³ SLW, 211

⁵⁵⁴ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (694) / Pap. VIII¹ A 250

Before God the mystery of the self is resolved and no secret of melancholy can be concealed. But melancholy's apparent lightness of being – in which one seemingly dances across the abyss – risks the loss of self through the nihilistic perpetuation of self-abstraction. Consider Kierkegaard's perturbing thought experiment in a Journal entry of 1849:

Question: Whether It Would Be Psychologically Correct, whether It Is Even Psychologically Conceivable.

A basically melancholic individual who otherwise had never been tormented or tempted by the thought of suicide.

He takes a walk one day in a beautiful wooded area. It has just been raining; everything smells fresh and fragrant; it occurs to him that he never or only rarely had felt so indescribably, so ineffably good.

As he walks along the thought comes to him *en passant*: what if you took your life – and he does it.

Here there is no pre-meditation about such a step, no sequence of events or violent agitation. The thought comes to him something like this: see, there is a delightful little flower; he commits the deed in about the same state of mind as that in which one bends down and picks a little flower; therefore death in this case would be a kind of well-being carried to a higher power.

Is such a thing conceivable?⁵⁵⁵

Melancholy's association with weight and heaviness has been established, but here is an instance of what Kierkegaard calls "an extreme example of being loosely attached to life."⁵⁵⁶ The 'self' becomes insubstantial, a virtually translucent, dream-like veneer between oneself and the world: "Melancholy's point of contact with insanity is, as in so many other respects, that one himself becomes an object. What is peculiar and unusual is the most idyllic objectivity, idyllically to mistake oneself for a little flower."⁵⁵⁷ This 'insanity' connotes the loss of being. "Depression is the hidden face of Narcissus," Kristeva writes, "the face that is to bear him away into death, but of which he is unaware while he admires himself in a mirage."⁵⁵⁸ Like Narcissus, metamorphosed into an object by his own self-reflection, Kierkegaard's melancholy individual is transformed into a flower. He has misplaced himself and either believes himself to be a flower, or else picks a flower unaware that in doing so he has plucked himself out of existence.

Furthermore, the aesthete is continually adept at dissembling the secret of his melancholy before 'the others', as confessed in 'Quidam's Diary':

At any time of day I can put off my melancholy, or rather put on my disguise, for melancholy merely waits for me till I am alone. If there is anybody present, whoever it may be, I am never quite what I am.⁵⁵⁹

It is only in solitude that melancholy can unveil itself. It is here that melancholy, unrelieved by distraction, meditates upon itself. "Just as a woman who is unhappy at home spends a lot of time looking out the window, so the soul of the melancholy person keeps on the lookout for diversions.

⁵⁵⁵ JP 3:2692 / Pap. X¹ A 642

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁸ *Black Sun*, 5

⁵⁵⁹ 'Guilty/Not Guilty?', SLW, 189

Another form of melancholy is the kind which keeps its eyes shut in order to have darkness all around.”⁵⁶⁰ This self-beguiling and erotic brooding can be discerned in Quidam’s poetic sighs:

Then shall I have peace, for the remembrance of melancholy is blessed and softened and is as happy as the weeping willow when it is swayed by the evening breeze.⁵⁶¹

Melancholy becomes, as Kierkegaard aptly phrases it, my “one intimate confidante.” This internal relationship can bear the ornamentation of the erotic: “she beckons to me, calls me aside, even though physically I remain on the spot. It is the most faithful mistress I have known – no wonder, then, that I must be prepared to follow at any moment.”⁵⁶² But this suggestion of being called aside by an other dissembles melancholy’s inherent narcissism. As Ronald Grimsely observes, “melancholy itself may be a subtle form of enjoyment and reveal the complacent egoism of a man who refuses to abandon a secret form of self-indulgence.”⁵⁶³ This auto-eroticism, by which the melancholic lives on intimate terms with melancholy, compounds melancholy’s conviction of the solitude of genius. Montaigne stoically advocated reflective retreat into one’s ‘private room’, but his temperance was suspicious of long term withdrawal into solitude.⁵⁶⁴ Baudelaire saw the poet as ‘the albatross’, captured and mocked by the crew of a ship, derided as a comic and invalid figure: “Exiled on the earth in the midst of derision / His giant wings keep him from walking.”⁵⁶⁵ Kierkegaard, ‘the wild goose’, ‘the storm-petrel’, recognised his own genius as a determinate in a melancholy which he interpreted as “the high price at which Almighty God sold me an intellectual power which has found no equal among its contemporaries.”⁵⁶⁶ And yet, as Gouwens observes, “Neither is Kierkegaard, for all his interest in what it is to be a ‘genius’, partial to the aristocratic Romantic notion that genius is necessary for self-knowledge. In contrast to this, he is stubbornly egalitarian in claiming that this self-reflection is a skill or capacity open to any person.”⁵⁶⁷ The lack of contemporary intellectual solidarity certainly confirmed his melancholy, yet, regretfully for his own sensitivity, Kierkegaard confesses how he was not protected by an inflated confidence in his genius. “That does not puff me up,” he declares, “for I am already ground to dust.”⁵⁶⁸ Once his cruel lampooning in *The Corsair* had made Kierkegaard a figure of disdain – even for the ‘common man’ with whom he fancied he had some affinity – he was now truly solitary, “God’s clown

⁵⁶⁰ JP 3:2688 / Pap. VIII¹ A 239

⁵⁶¹ SLW, 250

⁵⁶² JP 5:5496 / Pap. III A 114. ‘A’ also says in ‘Diapsalmata’: “My melancholy is the most faithful mistress I have ever known; what wonder, then, that I love in return.” (E/O I, 16)

⁵⁶³ *Søren Kierkegaard and French Literature*, 45

⁵⁶⁴ See M.A. Screech, *Montaigne and Melancholy*, p.68-69. “This calm withdrawal into self was the mark of the equable, sanguine [blood presiding over the other humours, healthy] melancholic. Its greatest contrast is with the solitary wildness of the man suffering from melancholy adust [burnt, dried out].” (69)

⁵⁶⁵ ‘L’Albatros’, *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, 24

⁵⁶⁶ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (600) / Pap. VII A 126

⁵⁶⁷ *Kierkegaard As Religious Thinker*, 57 n.4. Thomas V. Gilmartin contrasts Kierkegaard with the psychological approach of William James: “Unlike Kierkegaard who thought it was harmfully misleading to consider some people religious geniuses, James held that some do have a gift for religion as others have it for poetry or philosophy.” *Soul-Sickness: A Comparison of William James and Søren Kierkegaard*, Th.D. Dissertation, Berkely, California, 1974, p.88

⁵⁶⁸ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (600) / Pap. VII A 126

among men, the scourge of God.”⁵⁶⁹ The superiority and conceit of genius was little sanctuary for a man who called his brilliance a cause of “daily humiliation” for him. Hence Kierkegaard has been called “A man of superb intellect, and great spiritual strength, but a lopsided, tragic figure.”⁵⁷⁰

Genius itself succumbed to a melancholy which, Kierkegaard postulated, “must have its deeper roots in a disproportion between soul and body; for (and that is what is extraordinary) it has no relation to my mind.” In fact, Kierkegaard believed that due to this physical and psychical tension his mind was endowed with “a tensile strength which is rare.”⁵⁷¹ As such, melancholy potentially signifies a disorder which is profoundly more spiritual than mental. Eventually, the *genius*, for Kierkegaard, must become *religious* – though the expression of the religious demands its own solitude:

With the years, it is true, this pain diminishes more and more; for as more and more one becomes spirit, it causes no pain that one is not like the others. Spirit

⁵⁶⁹ Jørgen Bukdahl, *Søren Kierkegaard and the Common Man*, 101

⁵⁷⁰ Colin Wilson, *Religion and the Rebel*, 241. Ralph Harper concludes that, “He asked to be judged as a wild goose, by his indifference to the world. But he was one of the most thin-skinned men ever to have lived, and was abnormally *not* ‘indifferent’ to the world.” (*The Seventh Solitude: Metaphysical Homelessness in Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*, 9). Furthermore, Harper alleges, Kierkegaard became “so imprisoned in his melancholy, ‘my castle’, that he could not believe in human love as a solution. He who tried to become ‘contemporaneous’ with Christ could not believe he could become contemporaneous with Regine Olsen.” (*ibid.*, 24.) However, I believe that Harper is unfair to conclude that “almost everything Kierkegaard wrote was spoiled by his exasperation with the time in which he lived... not nearly so obsessed by his inherited sense of sin as he himself thought, Kierkegaard let himself be bogged down in an unedifying bickering with the Copenhagen bourgeoisie.” (*ibid.*, 27) On the contrary, as Stephen N. Dunning observes, Kierkegaard regulated his social façade with competent self-mastery. Kierkegaard’s remoteness dissembles his true nature: “Withdrawnness, then, is deceptive external behavior intended to conceal the fact of inner melancholy. It is not itself the internal state of melancholy but the external appearance contrived to contradict and conceal that internal state.” (*Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness: A Structural Analysis of the Theory of Stages*, 126). In support of the view that Kierkegaard’s withdrawnness constitutes only a secondary expression of his melancholy I cite the following: “What people regard as selfishness and lack of participation may sometimes be melancholy... Sometimes it can almost be thoughtfulness of others, in order not to let them feel how unhappy he is.” (JP 3:2690 / Pap. IX A 366) Especially when reading the bitter polemics of his later life, one could easily glean the impression that Kierkegaard, ultimately, could never forgive himself for his loneliness. Absorbed by the abyssal depths of his melancholy Kierkegaard arguably crafted his internal landscape into a hell on earth. However, I think Harper’s suspicion does great disservice to Kierkegaard’s own desire to overcome his melancholy and transform his suffering into joy, through the religious. Even Camus acknowledges that “Kierkegaard wants to be cured. To be cured is his frenzied wish and it runs throughout his whole journal.” (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, 41) I concur with Arbaugh and Arbaugh that Kierkegaard “treats *Christian* suffering as a distinct category, sharply distinguished from all other kinds of suffering.” (*Kierkegaard’s Authorship*, 192) Cultivating aesthetic suffering for its own sake, although something he at times had a propensity for, is sharply criticised by Kierkegaard. As Martin J. Heineken observes, “One thing that concerned Kierkegaard was that his melancholy should not be equated with the suffering of the Christian.” (*The Moment Before God*, 292) On the religious level his melancholy was transfigured by another possibility: that of the metamorphosis of spirit. “This melancholy [pertaining to his broken engagement] was really the *causa secunda*, the human time-cause of compulsion and selection, necessity and freedom, whereas the *prima causa* or primary cause was God Himself, His will in the shape of Kierkegaard’s inner call to an extraordinary task.” (Haecker, *Kierkegaard the Cripple*, 45)

⁵⁷¹ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (600) / Pap. VII A 126. The mutual desire of soul and body for severance from one another may be seen to produce melancholy’s sense of ‘looseness’ or ‘lightness’ of being. This is tempered by another traditional view of the relation between madness and genius deriving from “the ancient belief that both madmen and geniuses have souls and bodies more closely knit together than other men do.” Screech, *Montaine and Melancholy*, 37

is precisely this: not to be like others.⁵⁷²

Kierkegaard elsewhere calls this specifically “the negative definition of spirit.”⁵⁷³ This is the estrangement of spirit: its severance from all that is not spirit. “Of all anguish, the greatest is this – to have the task of being spirit and then to have to live among men.”⁵⁷⁴ This homelessness is the negative side of submitting to the metamorphosis of spirit: a transmutation which incurs its own Unhappy Consciousness – as in the religious melancholy of Abraham mentioned in Chapter One.

And yet it is the disillusion of melancholy which can inspire the longing to become spirit. As Kierkegaard’s ‘B’ (Judge William) prescribes to the melancholic aesthete ‘A’: “the men whose souls are acquainted with no melancholy are those whose souls have no presentiment for metamorphosis.”⁵⁷⁵ But this melancholy must be directed towards this transformation – towards the Wholly Other – and must not remain locked up in internalised self-infatuation. A laments how “Life has become a bitter drink to me, and yet I must take it like medicine, slowly, drop by drop.”⁵⁷⁶ And yet, admonishing A, Judge William is critically aware of how such lyricism can conceal a fashionable pretence which obscures the gravity of melancholy: “In our age it has become something great to be melancholy... but a man becomes melancholy by his own fault.”⁵⁷⁷ Poetic embellishment and distraction can constitute evasions of the brooding energy of spirit which struggles within melancholy. When spirit refuses “the satiety of pleasure” which intoxication offers to it, then it “gathers like a dark cloud... and it becomes an anguishing dread which ceases not even in the moment of pleasure.”⁵⁷⁸ Just as Vigilius Haufniensis wrote that one must “renounce anxiety without anxiety”,⁵⁷⁹ so one must finally conquer melancholy with a renunciation of melancholy’s erotic self-fascination or distraction. Hence Judge William extols A to recognise his melancholy as a form of despair:

Behold, my young friend, this life of yours is despair. Hide this if you will from others, from yourself you cannot hide it, it is despair. And yet in another sense this life is not despair. You are too frivolous to despair, and you are too melancholy not to come in touch with despair.⁵⁸⁰

Melancholy then is a precedent of despair for ‘A’ which can also function as an evasion of true despair. As such, by following Judge William’s counsel to ‘choose despair’,⁵⁸¹ ‘A’ would consciously and freely submit to the possibility of a spiritual metamorphosis. Within its gloomy tomb melancholy bears the presentiment of its own resurrection, for “Only spirit can relieve it, for it is a spiritual ailment.”⁵⁸² And yet, as the following chapter shall examine, the longing struggle of spirit’s relation to the Wholly

⁵⁷² ‘The Instant’, No. 10. Published after Kierkegaard’s death but written before his admittance to hospital, October 2, 1855, AUC, 286

⁵⁷³ PV, 81

⁵⁷⁴ JP 4:4325 / Pap IX A 38

⁵⁷⁵ E/O II, 160

⁵⁷⁶ E/O I, 20

⁵⁷⁷ E/O II, p.157

⁵⁷⁸ E/O II, 157

⁵⁷⁹ CA, 117

⁵⁸⁰ E/O II, 173

⁵⁸¹ E/O II, 177

⁵⁸² E/O II, 160. ‘B’ precedes this statement with a refutation of the material nature of melancholy: “for you hardly assume like many physicians that melancholy is an ailment of the body – and for all that, strangely enough, the physician cannot relieve it.”

Other is accompanied by its own persistent danger of falling back down into a deeper abyss of melancholy.

I must dare to believe that I can be saved by Christ from the power of melancholy in which I have lived.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸³ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (936) / Pap. X¹ A 510

Chapter Three: The Melancholy Theophany

If there were no eternal consciousness in a man, if at the foundation of all there lay only a wildly seething power which writhing with obscure passions produced everything that is great and everything that is insignificant, if a bottomless void [*bundløs Tomhed*] never satiated lay hidden beneath all – what would life be but despair?⁵⁸⁴

The Longing of Spirit

Religious melancholy attests to an inexhaustible yet apparently unfulfilled longing of spirit. “Spirit is restlessness; Christianity is the most profound restlessness of existence – so it is in the New Testament.”⁵⁸⁵ However, the recognition of spirit’s restless longing does not amount to the fulfilment of a longing that may remain continually defied. Spirit longs for God but it strives in the world of spiritlessness. This restless agitation does not resolve itself in a fluent transmutation of the individual into spirit. “Flesh and blood or the sensate – and spirit are opposites... From what do flesh and blood shrink from most of all? From dying. Consequently spirit is to will to die, to die to the world.”⁵⁸⁶ As flesh and blood resist their transubstantiation, so spirit’s restlessness is manifest through conflict. Kierkegaard thus claims that “God is man’s most redoubtable enemy, thy mortal enemy; He would that thou shouldst die, die unto the world”.⁵⁸⁷

Such, in Kierkegaard, is the melancholy love relationship between two qualities so infinitely different as humanity and divinity. Religious melancholy is the longing for God: it is the wound of a longing that has not yet attained to God – as such, its tension is analogous to an erotic longing or a love-melancholy. “Melancholy... is a sign that we have not been abandoned by God.”⁵⁸⁸ Yet its endurance may also point to the fact that we have not yet entirely left the aesthetic. In its melancholy the ‘self’ longs for God, though this melancholy darkens the perception of that which it longs for. Yet the severity of this enmity may subvert the course of the God-relationship. Consider the embellished antagonism described by Kierkegaard’s melancholic ‘A’.

There is still another proof for the existence of God, one which has hitherto been overlooked. It is propounded by a servant in Aristophene’s *The Knights*:

Demosthenes: Shrines? Shrines? Why surely you don’t believe
in the gods.

Nicias: I do.

Demosthenes: But what’s your argument? Where’s your proof?

Nicias: Because I feel they persecute me and hate me, in spite of
everything I try to please ‘em.

Demosthenes: Well, well. That’s true; you’re right about that.⁵⁸⁹

This persecution complex also finds expression in the confession of ‘A’ that “I feel as if I were a piece in a game of chess, when my opponent says of it: That piece cannot be moved.”⁵⁹⁰ ‘A’ articulates the

⁵⁸⁴ FT, 11

⁵⁸⁵ JP 4:4361 / *Pap.* XI² A 317

⁵⁸⁶ JP 4:4354 / *Pap.* XI¹ A 558

⁵⁸⁷ ‘The Instant’, No. 5, July 27, 1855, AUC, 157

⁵⁸⁸ Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, 26-27

⁵⁸⁹ E/O I, 29

⁵⁹⁰ E/O I, 17

familiar immobility of melancholy; yet, in contrast to the sterile inertia of *acedia*, he defines his anxious paralysis in relation to a definite, though unseen, Wholly Other.

Religious melancholy suggests the rise in the erotic longing of spirit, but spirit, as Kierkegaard tirelessly insists, is combative towards that which is other than itself. The melancholy longing is essentially antagonistic. The vacuity of modern spiritlessness can exacerbate melancholy while also serving to render the longings of spirit conspicuously frustrated. But, as Berger warns in regard to modernity's inhibition of religious desires, "Theologically, there are few ideas less helpful than the one that religious belief relates to religious need as orgasm does to lust."⁵⁹¹ In fact, for Kierkegaard, authentic Christianity does not serve its purpose in the satisfaction of useful needs. While he often describes the God-relation in erotic terms, the achievement of that relation is not to be understood simply as the sexualised consummation, and gratification, of religious longing. Spirit may represent restlessness, but it does not constitute a metaphysical itch in need of scratching. Kierkegaardian insistence on the antagonism of the infinite qualitative difference sees to it that there is no equation between wish and fulfilment in the authentic God-relationship.

Religious melancholy can indeed represent the stirring of spirit's longing, but it is a longing that does not have its gratification transpire in the very arousal of its need. In the agitation of spirit there is an incitement of opposition: the adversity between God and humanity, between spirit and spiritlessness. There is, however, a sense in which the erotic tension of religious longing is indefinitely preserved in this denial of consummation. Yet it is this very denial which asserts that Christianity is not the self-gratification of religious need, but a long arduous transmutation into spirit whose fulfilment is ultimately eschatological. The individual must first learn that to long for God and to possess God are not identical. Such religious aspiration and frustration is expressed by the ambivalent language of ekstasis and descent: the language of transitory theophany which reveals the sacred and the consequent melancholy fall back into the profane.

Ekstasis and Descent: Unfulfilled Longing and the Weight/Wait of Melancholy

Whither hast thou hidden thyself, And hast left me, O Beloved,
to my sighing?

Thou didst flee like the hart, having wounded me: I went
out after thee, calling, and thou wert gone.

– John of the Cross, 'Spiritual Canticle', 'Stanza the First'⁵⁹²

We have gone weighed down from beneath; the vision is frustrated.

– Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI, 9:4

Religious melancholy is, as McCarthy articulates, "longing for the Beloved, not as the young and the romantics understood it but rather as did the Christian mystics."⁵⁹³ Despite the meditation upon modernity's inhibition of religiousness, the frustrated erotic aspirations of religious longing are, as McCarthy suggests, not a uniquely modern experience. Burton's seventeenth century anthology *The*

⁵⁹¹ *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*, 40

⁵⁹² *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross, Vol. II*, 31

⁵⁹³ 'Kierkegaard's Religious Psychology', 238

Anatomy of Melancholy, for example, notably locates Religious Melancholy close to love-melancholy in a discussion which commences with a consideration of the allure and enticement of divine beauty. While a similar interaction of seduction and frustrated longing seems to affiliate the two, the 'Beloved' of Religious Melancholy is an ultimately unobtainable vision who overwhelms the sight of any prospective lover. Exodus 33 above all exemplifies this frustration for Burton since Moses, "when he desired to see God in His glory, was answered that he might not endure it, no man could see His face and live."⁵⁹⁴ Albeit with neoplatonic heritage lurking behind his words, Augustine expresses the restless desire for God with a similar evocation of the paradoxical longing: "Hide not Thy face from me. Even if I die, let me see Thy face lest I die."⁵⁹⁵ The absence of the face of the Beloved means a living death; the vision of the face is annihilation. The Beloved, and consequently the kingdom of the Beloved, must remain ultimately absent. "Where, beyond Heaven and earth, could I go that there my God might come to me – he who said, 'I fill heaven and earth'?"⁵⁹⁶ As Augustine describes, "Thou didst lift me up, that I might see that there was something to be seen, though I was not fit to see it."⁵⁹⁷ Just as Moses was permitted only to see the back of God (*posteriora dei*), the Augustinian theophany is qualified by a revelation of God's distance from the unworthy soul, and is therefore also a concealment.

Prior to his conversion, Augustine exhibits the characteristic disillusionment of the restless melancholic. He confesses his depressive experience initiated after the death of his beloved friend:

My native place was a torture room to me and my father's house a strange unhappiness... I became a hard riddle to myself, and I asked my soul why she was so downcast and why this disquieted me sorely... Nothing but tears were sweet to me and they took my friend's place in my heart's desire.⁵⁹⁸

This confession is a useful reminder of the characteristic substance of melancholy. Augustine expresses the exemplary sensations of spatial alienation ("my native place was a torture room to me..."); inscrutability of the self ("I became a hard riddle to myself..."); and the solace found in his own grief ("nothing but tears were sweet to me..."). Although the death of his friend provided a specific catalyst for his dis-ease, Augustine's sorrow relentlessly contaminates and renders insensate his entire material and temporal world. Augustine's absent friend is supplanted by the grief which "took my friend's place in my heart's desire." Melancholy typically becomes the focus of its own meditation.

Thus I fretted, sighed, wept, tormented myself, and took neither rest nor counsel, for I was dragging around my torn and bloody soul. It was impatient of my dragging it around, and yet I could not find a place to lay it down. Not in pleasant groves, nor in sport or song, nor in fragrant bowers, nor in magnificent banquetings, nor in the pleasures of the bed or the couch; not even in books or poetry did it find rest.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁴ *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Pt. 3, Sec. 4, Mem. I, Subs. I, p.315

⁵⁹⁵ *Confessions*, Book I, 5

⁵⁹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book I, 3

⁵⁹⁷ *Confessions*, Book VII, 137

⁵⁹⁸ *Confessions*, Book IV, 61. Parallel the impact on Montaigne of the loss of his own dear friend, La Boëtie (see Screech, *Montaigne and Melancholy*, 22).

⁵⁹⁹ *Confessions*, 63

Augustine discovers that even the pleasures that previously yielded him joy have lost their savour. Distraction loses its power to captivate; even expressions of meaning (books or poetry) have become drained of pathos. Augustine's Sisyphean melancholy diffuses a pollutant discomfort throughout his life. Thus Augustine expresses the feeling of weight so prominent in melancholy: "when my soul left off weeping, a heavy burden of misery weighed me down."⁶⁰⁰

As with Tolstoy in the nineteenth century, this exhaustion of his earthly lusts directed Augustine's melancholy towards eminently spiritual conclusions. He could thus be seen as embodying McCarthy's assertion that "Religious melancholy is the moment of crisis when the separation of the finite from the Infinite reaches a point of unendurable severity."⁶⁰¹ Severance has pronounced itself with such intensity for Augustine that the longing for transcendence overwhelms the weight of melancholy despondency. Attracted by eternity and sated by Plotinus, Augustine describes his epiphany in the language of ecstatic ascension: "I awoke in Thee, and beheld Thee as the Infinite, but not in the way I had thought – and this vision was not derived from the flesh."⁶⁰² This metaphysical language of *ekstasis* (literally 'standing outside oneself') implies the transcendence of the vanity of the mundane through the ascension towards the beyond. However, the transience of the consummation of religious longing may fuel rather than extinguish the anxious flame of melancholy. Burton acclaims how, "Ecstasis is a taste of future happiness, by which we are united unto God"; 'a divine melancholy, a spiritual wing', as Bonaventure terms it, to lift us up to heaven."⁶⁰³ Yet the gnawing question remains, as Plotinus ponders, "How, does it happen, therefore, that the soul does not abide there?"⁶⁰⁴ The melancholy soul has found its salvation in union with God: it has resolved the metaphysical riddle of its existence and transcended the isolation of its homelessness. "The soul then has another life,"⁶⁰⁵ as Plotinus writes. But this reinvigoration provides only transient sanctuary from a life of metaphysical exile. The melancholy question asserts itself, as Hadot asks, "how is it that we come back down? How can presence become absence? How can the flame of love be snuffed out?"⁶⁰⁶

Within the Plotinian framework, the reason for this reversion of presence to absence resides in our corporeality. Augustine similarly declares, "I was transported to Thee by Thy beauty, and then presently torn away from Thee by my own weight, sinking with grief into these lower things. This weight was carnal habit."⁶⁰⁷ The soul is encumbered by a melancholic gravity that cannot dissociate from its bondage to the things of this world. And so the soul is in tension between two memories: the instinctual recollection of the habitual flesh and the blessed recollection of *ekstasis*. And so the aspiration of melancholic disillusionment is frustrated by its own heaviness, or 'earthiness' and this constitutes the perpetual frustration of its desire for deliverance from its own gravity. Augustine

⁶⁰⁰ *ibid.*

⁶⁰¹ 'Kierkegaard's Religious Psychology', 257

⁶⁰² *Confessions*, Book VII, 140. Despite the neoplatonic affinity, Denys Turner notes that while for Plotinus the soul journeys in solitude (the flight of 'the alone to the alone'), for Augustine the soul is divinely guided. "Augustine is passively 'opened out' and it is God who does it. Both the steps on the ladder and the means of ascent differ." *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, 78

⁶⁰³ *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Pt. 3, Sec. 4, Mem. I, Subs. 2, (343)

⁶⁰⁴ *Enneads*, VI, 9:10

⁶⁰⁵ *Enneads*, VI, 9:9

⁶⁰⁶ Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus, or The Simplicity of Vision*, 64

⁶⁰⁷ *Confessions*, Book VII, 141-42

describes the dualism thus: "eternity attracts us from above, and the pleasure of earthly delight pulls us down from below, the soul does not will one or the other with all its force."⁶⁰⁸ Ekstasis may be succeeded by a melancholic sense of spiritual abandonment, aridity, desolation. Hence Burton warns that ekstasis may become, "a mere dotage, madness, a cause and symptom of Religious Melancholy."⁶⁰⁹

This eternal longing – this "metaphysical wound" – is inflamed as it aches for Divine healing. As such it is "a wound which is never entirely healed (thus the enduring melancholy in the religious man)"⁶¹⁰ – a diagnosis reminiscent of John of the Cross's description of the soul as "a living wound of desire".⁶¹¹ For John, the ignited love for God constitutes "a living flame, within the soul, it is ever sending forth its arrow-wounds, like most tender sparks of delicate love."⁶¹² The Beloved God remains perpetually hidden: as secret (*escondido*).⁶¹³ In her frustration the soul proclaims her melancholy longing: "her love's anxiety, reproaching Him for His absence, the more so because, being wounded by her love, for the which she has abandoned all things, yea even herself, she has still to suffer the absence of her Beloved and is not yet loosed from her mortal flesh that she may be able to have fruition of Him in the glory of eternity."⁶¹⁴

This anxious inability to derive release from longing after absence has understandably been called an "Eros-induced suffering."⁶¹⁵ It is in this desert of absence that the soul may descend into a spiritual *acedia* (*acidia espiritual*): a desiccated disillusionment in which even prayer refuses to yield its savour.⁶¹⁶ Prayer succumbs to 'aridity', as Teresa of Jesus likewise explores in *The Mansion of the Interior Castle*. Dryness and boredom infect prayer life, in "the pain of privation felt in arid prayer by contrast with the brief spells of union it has known. To the soul which has experienced union, God seems at all other times hopelessly far removed from it."⁶¹⁷ As John of the Cross puts it, one who has fallen from prayer becomes morose, "like a babe weaned from the breast, which he found so sweet."⁶¹⁸

In significant affinity with John of the Cross and Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius (Denys the Areopagite) likewise seeks the face of God, "but under the condition imposed by Exodus: 'no one may

⁶⁰⁸ *ibid.*, Book VIII, 168

⁶⁰⁹ *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Pt. 3, Sec. 4, Mem. I, Subs. 2, (343). However, Plotinus himself refutes any melancholic hatred of the body resulting from descent: "The sage will care for his earthly self and put up with it as long as he can, as a musician does with his lyre." After death, "He will leave it lying next to him and keep on singing, now without an instrument." *Enneads*, I,4:16. Cited in Hadot, *Plotinus*, 102. Hadot draws crucial attention to Porphyry's recount of Plotinus's advice to him when he was contemplating suicide. Porphyry recounts how Plotinus instructed him "that my desire did not come from a spiritual condition, but from some kind of melancholic illness, and he ordered me to go abroad." Cited in Hadot, *Plotinus, or The Simplicity of Vision*, 92.

⁶¹⁰ McCarthy, "Melancholy" and "Religious Melancholy" in Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaardiana X*, 162

⁶¹¹ Eugene A. Maio, *St. John of the Cross: The Imagery of Eros*, 10

⁶¹² 'Living Flame of Love', Stanza I, 8, *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross, Vol. III*, 23

⁶¹³ "thou must ever hold Him as hidden, and serve Him after a hidden manner, as One that is hidden."

'Spiritual Canticle', 'Stanza the First', 12, *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross, Vol. II*, 200

⁶¹⁴ 'Spiritual Canticle', 'Stanza the First', 1, *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross, Vol. II*, 31

⁶¹⁵ Eugene A. Maio, *St. John of the Cross: The Imagery of Eros*, 227

⁶¹⁶ *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Book I, ch. vii, 2, p.31

⁶¹⁷ E. W. Trueman Dicken, *The Crucible of Love: A Study of the Mysticism of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross*, 427

⁶¹⁸ *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Book I, ch. v, 24

see me and live””.⁶¹⁹ Turner describes this in terms of the convergence of the Mosaic theophany in Exodus with the Platonic allegory of the cave (*The Republic*, Book 7): “In both the Allegory and in Exodus, there is an ascent toward a brilliant light, a light so excessive as to cause pain, distress and darkness... even, as in Exodus, death, but not the darkness of the absence of light, rather of its excess”.⁶²⁰ To see God is to die, and yet, tortuously, not to see God is also to die; as Augustine longs, ‘*Even if I die, let me see Thy face lest I die.*’ He pleads like Moses for the presence of God: to see the face which he had previously refused to look upon. Moses, who in his fear had hidden his face from the theophany of the burning bush (Exodus 3:6), then desires to behold the glory (*kavod*) of God – a desire which God refuses to consummate since ‘shall no man see me, and live’ (Exodus 33:21). Instead God permits Moses only to see ‘my back parts; but my face shall not be seen’ (Exodus 33:23).

The question for modernity is whether it is recently, in the ‘death of God’, that humanity truly comes to know what it is to see the back of God (*Posteriora dei*), the God who has passed? Is our current melancholy burden hewn from a more immovable Sisyphean stone than the weight of mystical descent? Is ours a burden without ecstatic relief in a now disavowed metaphysical beyond? Is our religious melancholy no longer consoled by the metaphysical grand narrative that subsidises the dualism of ekstasis and descent, of presence and absence? This is not to say that Augustine’s resolution of melancholy disillusion through the turn to God is no longer an option available to us; rather it is to suggest that the implied neoplatonic language of ekstasis and descent may no longer be appropriate to a description of a contemporary religious melancholy.⁶²¹

Neither is this to say that religious longing itself vanishes with the beyond, or that transcendent longing vanishes along with transcendence. For many people, as Rubenstein comments, “Their experience of the death of God rests upon their loss of faith in the transcendent God of History, but not necessarily upon the loss of the sense of the sacred.”⁶²² Perhaps religious melancholy endures less with recourse to ecstatic consolation, and more in terms of a re-orientated relation to absence. Or perhaps ecstatic melancholy is supplanted by another malaise in modernity: that of the desacralisation of the celestial and the terrestrial, the absence of the sacred – the Holy – in modern life.

The Vanishing Theophany?

[D]oes he alone see God who sees God turn his face toward him, or does he not also see God who sees him turn his back, just as Moses continually saw nothing but the Lord’s back?
– Kierkegaard, ‘The LORD Gave, and the LORD Took Away; Blessed be the Name of the LORD’, EUD, 121

⁶¹⁹ Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 47

⁶²⁰ *The Darkness of God*, 17-18

⁶²¹ Worthy of note, however, is Denys Turner’s claim that the reading of neoplatonic metaphors of medieval mystical theology as relating primarily to metaphysical mystical ‘experience’ is an invention of modern scholarship. Turner suggests that deconstructive postmodernism actually comes closer to reviving the authentic nature of medieval apophaticism than modern ‘experientialism’. See ‘Introduction’, *The Darkness of God*

⁶²² *After Auschwitz*, 294

The melancholy question can be understood as one of our incapacity to behold God. In Exodus 3 it is Moses's self-abasement which refuses to perceive the theophany of the burning bush, and the audacity of his gaze which in Exodus 33 is refused by the God who passes by. As Levinas writes, "The glorious theophany which makes so much humility possible will be missed because of the humility which lowers the eyes. Later, on the rock of Horeb, the prophet ventures to know, but glory is refused to the boldness that seeks it."⁶²³ In other words, in what Levinas calls the "enigma"⁶²⁴ of the theophany at Horeb – an enigma which collapses the dichotomy of presence and absence – the glory of God is disclosed "As transcendence, a pure passage, it shows itself as past. It is a trace."⁶²⁵ As Robins explains, "Moses sees God leaving, but what he sees is not a sign of departure. He sees a God who disappears *in* his appearance, a proximity in retreat, an extremity that is always already past."⁶²⁶ But Levinas does not interpret this disappearance of God as a reason for despair. His philosophy is not a melancholy nostalgia for a metaphysical homecoming. The metaphysical dualism of the presence/absence of a *deus otiosus* is not appropriate to the Judeo-Christian God. "The revealed God of our Judeo-Christian spirituality maintains all the infinity of his absence... He shows himself only by his trace, as is said in Exodus 33."⁶²⁷

This theophany – in its refusal of full disclosure – recalls the self-concealing revelation of the *'ehyeh asher 'ehyeh*. "Both in Exod. 3 and Exod. 33 God is a *deus absconditus*."⁶²⁸ The biblical treatment of the hiddenness of God, it must be remembered, is an inquest into the averted face, the *hester panim*, and not the *metaphysical* question of divine presence or absence, not the *ontological* dilemma of God's existence.⁶²⁹ Furthermore, Levinas explicitly rejects divine hiddenness as a cause for melancholy or despair. We do not mourn a departed God who passes from presence to absence, existence to non-existence, or life to death.

Likewise, according to Mark C. Taylor's 'postmodern a/theology of erring', the metaphysical archaeology and eschatology of presence and absence are no longer tenable causes for lamentation and

⁶²³ 'Enigma and Phenomenon', *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 72

Levinas relates his remarks on the humility of Moses to Treatise *Berakhot* 7a, referring to Exodus 3:6. "The Holy One, blessed be He, spoke thus to Moses: When I wanted you did not want [to see my face], now that you want, I do not want." *The Babylonian Talmud*, trans. Isadore Epstein (quoted in Jill Robins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature*, 36)

⁶²⁴ "...going back to the etymology of this Greek term [*ainigma* – obscure or equivocal word, a riddle], and contrasting it with the indiscreet and victorious appearing of a *phenomenon*." 'Enigma and Phenomenon', 70

⁶²⁵ 'Enigma and Phenomenon', 72. "The trace, as Levinas defines it, leaves a trace by effacing its traces. Such a trace is not the mark of an absence (which could be conceived in relation to a past or modified presence). Rather, it is the mark of the effacement of a mark. As it is the mark of the effacement of a mark that was already the mark of an absence, it is a double effacement, a double erasure, a re-mark and a re-tracing [*un re-trait*]." Jill Robins, 'Tracing Responsibility in Levinas's Ethical Thought', ed. Peperzak, *Ethics as First Philosophy*, 177

⁶²⁶ Jill Robins, *Altered Reading*, 35

⁶²⁷ 'Meaning and Sense', *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 64

⁶²⁸ Jill Robins, 'Tracing Responsibility in Levinas's Ethical Thought', *Ethics as First Philosophy*, 180

⁶²⁹ "The fool whom the Psalmist envisaged as saying 'in his heart' that there is no God was not when he spoke Hebrew denying that God existed but was supposing that God was temporarily absent. And St. Anselm's mistranslation of the impious Hebrew fool into an atheistic medieval Latin fool was still only speculative; atheism, for Anselm, was a logical possibility which theism had to consider, but not a true live moral option which the theist had to fear as a serious rival." Alasdair MacIntyre, 'The Debate

nostalgia. As Taylor sees it, the traditionally theological view of history implies a primal fall from divine presence into an exilic period during which alienated humanity wanders through a desert of estrangement. In this essentially ontotheological paradigm, the fall from presence to absence is countered by an eschatological promise of metaphysical homecoming. This nostalgic hope determines the primal fall as “an *aberration*, a *temporary* aberration. This transitory detour has a definite purpose – its end is the end of exile and the return to/of presence.”⁶³⁰ On the contrary, like Levinas, Taylor suggests that absence itself is actually primal, and therefore not preceded by an original presence whose return constitutes the *telos* of history. “If *lack* is primal, then plenitude and the total presence it entails are never present or are ‘present’ only as ‘absent.’ Accordingly, ‘exile’ is ‘original’ and is not subsequent to an antecedent ‘time’ that was unstained by the agony of ‘loss’ and untainted by the tension of ‘estrangement’.”⁶³¹ Lack, as such, does not denote the deficient loss of a primal presence. It is not enmeshed in a metaphysical, or other-worldly, structure of archaeology and eschatology. “That which is, in other words, is not necessarily other than what ought to be. Apart from the reality of a pure origin, there can be no fall that begins a period of exile.”⁶³²

Without recourse to pre-lapsarian recollection or redemption, the wanderer is irremediably homeless and nameless; but the wanderer is decisively *not* despairing. Taylor’s Postmodern ‘Erring’ is not the exilic wandering of an Unhappy Consciousness since there is no ideal meta-narrative presence from which to be banished. Instead, erring describes the endless peregrinations of a “serpentine wandering” by virtue of “mazing grace” in the opening created by “the death of God, the loss of self and the end of history.”⁶³³ One is situated in “the midst of a labyrinth from which there is no exit”,⁶³⁴ but, like Altizer, Taylor relieves this homelessness of the existential dis-ease of dread. Instead of a melancholy longing in the lacuna of presence, there is the playful acceptance of the superficiality of this interminable labyrinth. “In opposition to the history of ontotheology, a/theology insists on the irreducibility of the trace... From the viewpoint of a/theology, there never was a pure origin and never will be a perfect end... The ateleology and aneschatology of radical a/theology end all endgames by keeping openness open and showing every mark to be incurable.”⁶³⁵

Taylor’s mistrust of the teleological priority of presence over absence inevitably loses the infinite difference in which melancholy meditates and “subverts the opposition between the sacred and profane.”⁶³⁶ But Mircea Eliade, for one, does not invite a desacralised world with such open arms. For Eliade, the God who has passed by is the God who has retreated: the *deus otiosus*. This apparent recession of God from presence to absence reveals to the modern human subject a melancholy vacuum of demystified space. Yet it remains possible for us to discern the profanity of modern life momentarily

about God: Victorian Relevance and Contemporary Irrelevance’, *The Religious Significance of Atheism*, 12-13

⁶³⁰ Mark C. Taylor, *Erring*, 153

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, 154

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 155

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 150

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 168

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 155

⁶³⁶ “The profanation of the sacred and the sacralization of the profane disclose that no-thing is truly sacred and thus nothing is simply profane.” *Ibid.*, 169

broken by eruptions of the sacred, as quickening moments of *hierophany* [Greek *heiros* – ‘sacred’]. It is these sacred transfigurations that Eliade juxtaposes against the spiritual *acedia* of profane modern existence. These erupting *hierophanies* presuppose a desert of sameness, of profanity, an absence of the sacred, in which to strike an absolute centre of wholly otherness. “[T]here is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the normality of the vast surrounding expanse. The manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world.”⁶³⁷

Eliade, by invoking the phrase *ganz andere* (wholly other) to describe these interruptions of the profane “homogeneity of space”,⁶³⁸ thereby affiliates ‘the sacred’ with Rudolf Otto’s notion of ‘the Holy’ (*Das Heilige*).⁶³⁹ Eliade affirms what Carl Olsen describes as a ‘theology of nostalgia’ for a rustic cosmic Christianity exemplified by the agricultural appropriations of Christianity, as a sanctification of nature, in rural peasantry.⁶⁴⁰ Whilst not necessarily ascribing to a Platonic pre-natal recollection of an ideal homeland, Eliade discerns *homo religiosus* as harbouring a primal “nostalgia for paradise as an ancient archetype hidden within the human mind trying to come forth.”⁶⁴¹ Likewise Otto can also be suspected of a nostalgia for a declining theophany of the Holy which is all but extinct in modern life. Hence Otto is often inclined towards reinvigorating the impression of the numinous from the archives of the Old Testament – as also discerned for example in “the genuinely numinous narrative of the theophany in the burning bush.”⁶⁴² Despite suggestions of historicism and idealism, Eliade’s nostalgia, in many ways similar to Otto’s, articulates his vision “for a resacralization and remythologization of contemporary culture.”⁶⁴³ Such an impetus for reinvigoration suggests that the longing for the sacred partakes of a retrospective, even retrogressive, nostalgia. Must it therefore remain tied to an erotic structure of longing and consummation, of archaeology and eschatology, of discredited metaphysical desire?

Is Otto also striving for a nostalgic return to ecstatic religion? After all, Otto exalts Plato for his non-rational pursuit of knowledge of God “by the ‘ideograms’ of myth, by ‘enthusiasm’ or inspiration, ‘eros’ or love, ‘mania’ or the divine frenzy.”⁶⁴⁴ Otto even describes the element of ‘fascination’ by which mystery “captivates and transports... with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy intoxication; it is the Dionysiac-element in the numen.”⁶⁴⁵ Yet after the descent from beatific union, the snare of melancholy still awaits. The antecedent economy of ekstasis and descent describes the soul’s intoxicated transportation by the *mysterium tremendum* and subsequent resumption of “its ‘profane’, non-religious mood of everyday experience.”⁶⁴⁶ The otherness of the experience postulates religious truth as wholly other than the mundane. “Mysticism continues to

⁶³⁷ *The Sacred and the Profane*, 21

⁶³⁸ *The Sacred and the Profane*, 21

⁶³⁹ See ‘Introduction’ to *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*

⁶⁴⁰ See Carl Olsen, *The Theology and Philosophy of Eliade: A Search for the Centre*, Chapter 4 ‘Theology of Nostalgia’

⁶⁴¹ Olsen, *The Theology and Philosophy of Eliade*, 59

⁶⁴² Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 77

⁶⁴³ Olsen, *The Theology and Philosophy of Eliade*, 59

⁶⁴⁴ “No one has enunciated more definitively than this master-thinker that God transcends all reason, in the sense that He is beyond the powers of our conceiving, not merely beyond the powers of comprehension.” *The Idea of the Holy*, 98

⁶⁴⁵ *The Idea of the Holy*, 31

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 13

its extreme point this contrasting of the numinous object (the numen), as the ‘wholly other’, with ordinary experience.”⁶⁴⁷ However, once the soul is quickened by its glimpse behind the veil of the sacred, the world – the mundane ‘unreal’ world whose gravity lulls it back – sinks even deeper into aridity and shadow. The true life is absent:⁶⁴⁸ an inescapably melancholy assertion.

When it comes to the *prophetic* rather than platonic experience, however, Otto disputes suggestions of a metaphysical beyond as an anthropocentrically projected attempt to transcend disillusion with the material world. Instead, Otto gives primacy to the reality of spirit in contrast to which the flesh attains its comparative infamy: “it is not because a ‘natural’ pessimism first led man to regard himself and all things of the world as flesh, that the idea of *ruach* arose as an imaginary compensating counterpart. Just the opposite is true. It is when the intimation of *ruach* has been awakened that all the things of this world sink into flesh.”⁶⁴⁹ In other words, religion is primal; the sacred does not originate in an attempt to transcend the profane. The beyond is not a dreamworld which initiates from my own unconscious; instead, profanity is overshadowed by the genuine awakening of the sacred as the consummation of reality. If this priority is correct then must one say that some form of disillusion results indirectly from the awakening of spirit; as opposed to a ‘natural’ melancholy disillusionment which consequently projects a religious point from which to transcend itself? Melancholy is therefore the reaction of disillusionment to the unrealised reality of spirit, rather than spirit being the invention of melancholy’s desire to escape itself. “Flesh is the shadow of *ruach* and can only appear when the latter has first been experienced.”⁶⁵⁰ There is no discernible shadow without the precedence of light.

Kierkegaard also implies this priority in juxtaposing ‘spirit’ to ‘spiritlessness’. Kierkegaard’s opposition of spirit and spiritlessness is not principally a metaphysical dualism; it is one of tension and difference. The words themselves imply the priority of ‘spirit’ over its absence, ‘spiritlessness’. The consciousness of spiritlessness, as has and will continue to be discussed, is an activity of the dialectical awakening of spirit: negatively conceived as melancholy, as despair. Similarly, Eliade’s contrast of sacred and profane is a lament for the absence of the sacred *within* the profane. Eliade is emphatic that potentially “the cosmos in its entirety can become a hierophany.”⁶⁵¹ A hierophany is not an ascension but a transfiguration *in this world*. For example, “The hierophany of a stone is pre-eminently an ontophany; above all, the stone *is*, it always remains itself, it does not change – and it *strikes* man by what it possesses of irreducibility and absoluteness and, in so doing, reveals to him by analogy the irreducibility and absoluteness of being.”⁶⁵² The sacred appears as Wholly Other than the profane, but also as that which the profane should be: the consummate ontology of the profane, its return to the centre of all existence. In a sense we could say that it is this world – *spiritlessness* – that is wholly other than the sacred. The sacralised world realises its genuine ontology in the *hierophany* which defies dualism.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 29

⁶⁴⁸ *Totality and Infinity*, 33.

⁶⁴⁹ Rudolf Otto, ‘The Prophet’s Experience of God’, *Religious Essays*, 32

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 32

⁶⁵¹ *The Sacred and the Profane*, 12

The otherness of God has been asserted with renewed polemical vigour in modern western theology. Specifically it is within the modern response of dialectical neo-orthodoxy to liberal theology that the phrase ‘Wholly Other’ forges its cutting edge. Otto has been credited with the introduction of the phrase ‘Wholly Other’ (*das Ganz Andere*) into modern usage,⁶⁵³ although Otto himself may in turn have assumed the term from Jakob Fries.⁶⁵⁴ Regardless of the ingenuity or etymology of the phrase, Otto undoubtedly “filled the term with a content much richer than did Fries, using it against any attempt to confine religion within the web of human reason.”⁶⁵⁵ At this time it is the voices of Otto and also Barth that wield the term with most theological purpose. Nevertheless, these thinkers cannot be completely united with one voice in the invocation of *das Ganz Andere*. Whilst Otto displays his Kantian and Friesian interests, Barth’s development of the idea is avowedly indebted to Kierkegaard, as discussed in Chapter One. There is, however, often ominous resonance between the Kierkegaardian and Ottonian appreciation of God, especially in the description of the response to the divine presence. As such, Westphal identifies that “When Kierkegaard [Anti-Climacus in *Practice in Christianity*] speaks of the ‘shudder which is the first experience of worship,’ he is talking about what Otto calls the *tremendum*.”⁶⁵⁶ However, although he may have been a fruitful addition, Otto does not resource the Kierkegaardian corpus in his anthology of numinous descriptions. As Almond deduces, “Otto’s use of it [the phrase ‘Wholly Other’] has overtones of Kierkegaard also, but I have found no evidence that Otto was at all familiar with Kierkegaard’s works.”⁶⁵⁷ In fact, as Gooch points out, Otto even refers derisively to Kierkegaard as an “hysteric.”⁶⁵⁸ This comment suggests a particularly acid dismissal of the sort of dialectical and existentialist theology which elicits Otto critique that “Christ did not come to ‘solve existential problems (*Existenzprobleme*)’ or to save skeptics from their doubts... Whoever wants to get rid of world-*ängste* would do better to consult his physician.”⁶⁵⁹

Having suffered derision from the young students of the then fashionable Barthianism and Bultmann,⁶⁶⁰ Otto appears intent on trivialising these theological movements – even though Barth

⁶⁵² *The Sacred and the Profane*, 155

⁶⁵³ Todd A. Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity: An Interpretation of Rudolf Otto's Philosophy of Religion*, 2

⁶⁵⁴ Philip Almond, citing Paul Seifert’s *Die Religions philosophie bei Rudolf Otto*, suggests this. *Rudolf Otto: An Introduction to His Philosophical Theology*, 68

⁶⁵⁵ Almond, *Rudolf Otto: An Introduction to His Philosophical Theology*, 68

⁶⁵⁶ Merold Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death*, 38

⁶⁵⁷ *Rudolf Otto*, 154 n.39

⁶⁵⁸ *The Numinous and Modernity*, 136. In a letter to Jakob Wilhelm Hauer (20th May, 1928) Otto also dismisses Heidegger’s existentialist philosophy after reading *Sein und Zeit* as “a kind of mental illness (*Geisteskrankheit*)”. Cited in *The Numinous and Modernity*, 211 n.42.

Melissa Raphael notes that “the assimilation of the Ottonian concept of holiness into existentialist philosophies is foreign to Otto’s thought. At the end of his life, Otto utterly derided the equation of the ‘Holy’ and ‘Being’. He did not consider ‘being’ holy in itself.” *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, 83

⁶⁵⁹ ‘Sittengesetz und Gotteswille’, cited in Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 136

⁶⁶⁰ Bultmann, who had been a friend of Otto’s at Breslau, wrote in a letter to Barth how “Otto and I grew so far apart that our students, too, were aware of the antithesis between his work and mine.” Geoffrey W. Bromily, trans. and ed., *Karl Barth – Rudolf Bultmann Letters: 1922-1966: Edited by*

himself had responded favourably to the publication of *Das Heilige* in 1917 in a letter to Eduard Thurneysen. But, as Lynn Poland explains, “What Barth finds to praise in Otto’s work is, unsurprisingly, what they have in common: the notion of a transcendent that is ‘wholly other,’ beyond reason, but also beyond all human labor, a source of value securely placed ‘across the border’ from a civilization perceived to be in crisis.”⁶⁶¹ Yet, despite a common appreciation for Luther’s esteem of the non-rational knowledge of God, Otto may have been reticent to be enlisted as an ally of Barth’s doctrine of *das Ganz Andere*. John Harvey, the English translator of *The Idea of the Holy*, writes how Otto “always held that the doctrine of the school of Karl Barth with its unmitigated assertion of the *Ganz Andere*, the ‘wholly otherness of God’, was a one-sided aberration.”⁶⁶² In turn Barth, in his *Church Dogmatics*, grew wary of identifying *das Heilige* of Otto with the ‘Holy One’ of the Bible.⁶⁶³

It is reasonable to suggest that Otto appears relatively unfamiliar with Kierkegaard and disinclined, by Barthian association, to familiarise himself. However, this must not cause us to overlook the possible affinities between their understanding of God. Essentially, despite the disparity, mistrust, and even misunderstanding between their thought, it is still possible to regard Barth and Otto – and even Kierkegaard – as respondents to what each in their own way perceived as a modern malaise.

Whereas Kierkegaard’s writings locate the infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity in the gulf of sin, Otto’s Wholly Other is principally a reaction to the presence of the *mysterium*:

“something which has no place in our scheme of reality but belongs to an infinitely different one, and which at the same time arouses an irrepressible interest in the mind.”⁶⁶⁴ This is not to say that Kierkegaard and Otto fundamentally diverge, or that these are not different expressions of a common idea. Rather, this variance conveys a sense that Otto’s concern is to reawaken the numinous in the disenchanted modern understanding, rather than prompt subjective overcoming of existential estrangement. However, a mutual melancholy lament does resound in both the Kierkegaardian individual ‘Unhappy Consciousness’ and what Otto perceived as the prevailing devolution of the supernatural in modern life. In order to function as a ‘cure’ for rupture, the Holy must be rehabilitated, not simply in existentialist subjectivity, but in a reawakened modern consciousness. The disillusion of modernity is no longer inevitably inclined towards the religious as a means of resolving melancholy, since the religious has itself become a cause of disillusionment. Modern life on the whole is not conducive to the reception of the Holy, and so Otto discerned that humanity’s recognition of the numinous was endangered and in drastic need of reawakening. “For Otto,” as Gooch describes, “the disillusioned (*entnaivisierte*) culture of the twentieth century is an obstacle to the recognition of the

Bernd Jaspert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 162. Cited in Michael Lattke, ‘Rudolf Bultmann on Rudolf Otto’, *Harvard Theological Review*, 78 (1985), 353.

⁶⁶¹ ‘The Idea of the Holy and the History of the Sublime’, *Journal of Religion*, 72 (1992), 184

⁶⁶² ‘Obituary for Rudolf Otto’, *The Friend*, March 19, 1937, 258 (quoted in Almond, *Rudolf Otto*, 4)

⁶⁶³ “The holy God of Scripture is certainly not ‘the holy’ of R. Otto, that numinous element which, in its aspect as *tremendum*, is in itself and as such the divine.” *Church Dogmatics* II.1, p.360. “Whatever ‘the holy’ of Rudolf Otto may be, it certainly cannot be understood as the Word of God, for it is the numinous and the numinous is the irrational, and the irrational can no longer be differentiated from an absolutized natural force.” *Church Dogmatics* I.1, p.135. This seems a particularly unjust criticism insofar as Otto himself speaks rather of the “non-rational” and “supra-rational” and even criticises Luther for implying that the rational is less essential than the non-rational. *The Idea of the Holy*, 102

holy... Thus, the numinous origin of religion invoked by Otto on the pages of *Das Heilige* is one that remains ultimately irretrievable for the modern religious subject.”⁶⁶⁵

Otto diagnosed modernity essentially in terms of the evacuation of the supernatural from the prevailing intellectual worldview. As Gooch explains, “Within the order of natural scientific knowledge, this exclusion is reflected in the demystification (*Entgötterung*) of nature in the wake of Copernican astronomy and Newtonian physics, and in the transition from metaphysics to critical philosophy inaugurated by Kant.”⁶⁶⁶ By asserting God as Wholly Other, Otto brings the prevailing world-view into collision with something which infinitely differentiates itself from it. Reawakening the numinous consciousness will not constitute a reconciliation with our deeper selves but an abrasive encounter with Absolute Otherness – with *mysterium*. As such, Otto seeks to evoke the uncanny complexion of the Holy as something mysterious and exoticised by retreading the now re-hallowed ground of “a wonderfully defamiliarized Bible.”⁶⁶⁷ By transcribing the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, Otto’s reminder of the core of religion is expressed in a form which invokes an infinite qualitative difference between humanity and the Holy. As such, it “inevitably reproduces the estrangement that it is intended to overcome.”⁶⁶⁸

Yet this estrangement is not an abyssal alienation in need of existential reconciliation. The processes of rationalisation and demystification of religion do not serve to refine and perfect, but rather to undermine the core of religion. “Religion will have its mysteries as mysteries intact”, insists Otto, “A religious mystery is not something obscure for the time, capable, like the mysteries of chemistry, of ultimate solution; nor is it an ‘arcanum’, mysterious only for the lower orders, the ‘profane’, and convertible for the adepts into Gnosis.”⁶⁶⁹ The resolution of mystery does not cause religion to evolve but to dissolve from the centre. Mystery – the heartbeat of religion – is preserved in inscrutability, in de-familiarity, as “an absolute *ineffable*.”⁶⁷⁰ Thus Otto’s rehabilitation of an antiquated religious heritage of the numinous, in riposte to the impiety of the age, serves to reacquaint the reader with the mystery from which they have become estranged. In this sense, naturalism and immanence actually signify alienation from the true nature of the sacred. We must overcome our estrangement from estrangement. *Mysterium* is primal and irreducible in the *alterity* of the Holy. This recalls, I suggest, as a mutual meeting point for Otto and Kierkegaard, Westphal’s plea for overcoming “ontological xenophobia, the fear of meeting a stranger, even if the stranger should be God.”⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁴ *The Idea of the Holy*, 29

⁶⁶⁵ Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 24

⁶⁶⁶ *The Numinous and Modernity*, 187. Gooch bases this assessment on Otto’s manuscript ‘Fortsetzung’, an apparent continuation of his 1927 lectures on *Glaubenslehre*.

⁶⁶⁷ Poland’s phrase. ‘The Idea of the Holy and the History of the Sublime’, 185

⁶⁶⁸ Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 213

⁶⁶⁹ Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion: Based on Kant and Fries*, 124-125

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

...[A]ll men are strangers in the world. And that God too, in exile, dwells as a stranger in His own creation.⁶⁷²

"If commentators on the contemporary situation of religion agree about anything," Peter Berger surmises, "it is that the supernatural has departed from the modern world. This departure may be stated in such dramatic formulations as 'God is dead' or 'the post-Christian era'. Or it may be undramatically assumed as a global and probably irreversible trend."⁶⁷³ Nevertheless, despite the pervading modern anxiety and vacuity, and perhaps in a significant sense *due* to this lacuna of the religious, Otto's attempt to rehabilitate the Holy into modern understanding appeared to resonate with a latent human longing. In a world in which the absence of God gaped wide open like a wound, it is understandable that the most amenable possibility seemed to be the God whose absence is incorporated, even explained or sanctified, in an understanding of the divine as Wholly Other. The unanticipated popularity of Otto's study suggested a possibility for rediscovering a sense for mystery in an age of loss and Divine extraction. Otto rendered the Holy retrievable, though uncompromisingly and essentially mysterious, by exploiting a sense of distance between modernity and the primal experience of the sacred that arouses a submerged longing which is itself infinitely unconsummated in the ultimate preservation of the inscrutability of the *mysterium*.

But is the reception of Otto's thought – in resonance with a modern deficiency – therefore inescapably historical? Friedrich Feigl, for one, accounted for the success of *Das Heilige* precisely on the historical contingency of a world war which he described specifically as "the manifestation of *the unholy*." According to Feigl, "with the intensity and passion of the defeat, which received its vigor from the *horror vacui*, the emaciated soul of the German people turned toward the 'holy'."⁶⁷⁴ In other words, the Holy embodies the diversion of the transcendent in the face of immanent despair. Otto presents the uncanny as mysterious distraction from all too immanent desolation. The other-worldly relief of some rediscovered form of mystified ekstasis is evoked in what Gooch calls the "de-familiarized world of ecstatic religious transport."⁶⁷⁵

Yet, despite the conspicuous historical crisis of the time, Gooch convincingly argues that Feigl's critique fails to account for the appeal of Otto's work beyond post-war Germany, both geographically and historically. Instead Gooch reads *Das Heilige* as a continuation of Otto's pre-war theological venture⁶⁷⁶ and astutely describes the work as "the expression of a melancholic form of religious subjectivity."⁶⁷⁷ This does not refer to Otto's own melancholic temperament,⁶⁷⁸ but to "the

⁶⁷¹ 'Overcoming Ontological Xenophobia', 156

⁶⁷² Elie Wiesel, 'Rebbe Barukh of Medzebozh', *Four Hasidic Masters and Their Struggle against Melancholy*, 45

⁶⁷³ *A Rumor of Angels*, 13

⁶⁷⁴ 'Das Heilige': *Kritische Abhandlung über Rudolf Otto's gleichnamiges Buch* (Haarlem: Bohn, 1929), 1. Cited in Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 133.

⁶⁷⁵ *The Numinous and Modernity*, 133

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 134-135

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 215

⁶⁷⁸ In *Men, Religion, and Melancholia: James, Otto, Jung, and Erikson*, Donald Capps has examined Otto as a victim of "religious melancholia" (Capps uses the terms 'melancholy' and 'melancholia' interchangeably, arguing that "*melancholy* is *depression* in contemporary culture" *Ibid.*, 3).

sense of loss of religious immediacy built into Otto's writing".⁶⁷⁹ In this sense, Otto's work nourishes itself upon a melancholic longing implicit in modern loss of the Holy. "Melancholy," as Gooch therefore describes, "is characterized by a sense of yearning for a state of being that has been irrevocably lost or remains otherwise unobtainable, and is conceived as 'wholly other' than, and therefore absent from, the present in which the melancholic subject is located."⁶⁸⁰

However, it may well be that this melancholy loss is itself irretrievably historical. Like Kierkegaard, Otto was a man of his time clearly affected by the theological aporias of his age. An essential concern for Otto was the evolutionary optimism of Darwinism and its implicit threat to render religion superfluous. Such faith in natural science gave rise to the possibility of "the assumption that religion was simply a leftover from a more primitive stage of man's development."⁶⁸¹ Contrastingly Otto wished to assert that religion was primal, but not therefore primitive and dispensable. Instead Otto emphasises the qualitative and inviolable otherness of the sacred in order to preserve its primacy at a time when it is under the greatest threat of submersion.⁶⁸² Otto's insistence upon God as Wholly Other, and the irreducible mystery of the uncanny, preserves the Holy in a space independent of and

For Capps, *Religious melancholia* – unlike melancholia per se – is diagnosed as always traceable to early childhood trauma (*Ibid.*, 10) due to which "religion serves as a stand-in for the mother, or for the son's relationship to his mother" (*Ibid.*, 3). As such, religion for the sufferer bears the scars characteristic of this ambivalent mother-son relationship. Capps writes, "To experience separation from one's mother is one thing; sadness and longing will surely result. But to experience the withdrawal of her love in an especially cruel or unfeeling manner is another. Severe melancholia is the predictable outcome" (*Ibid.*, 9). With the loss of the 'object' there is invariably a loss of 'self'. Religious redemption thus occurs as a means of 'self'-restoration. Yet, the 'God' of this religion adopts the analogous ambivalent characteristics of the lost 'object'. As a form of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, the 'God-relationship' is tainted with feelings of inscrutability, hatred, fear, resentment and awe: "The lost object – the mother who has nothing but love for her son – is internalized, and this object now becomes the focus of his ambivalent feelings of love and hate. He loves the perfect mother, the mother of his fondest and most beautiful visions, but he also hates her, because she has betrayed and forsaken him" (*Ibid.*, 16). The *mysterium tremendum* evident in Luther and Otto's theologies betray this sense of thrilling fear in the presence of a God who is both transcendent and perfect. The once familiar giver of love suddenly becomes untouchable, concealed, 'Wholly Other'. The mother becomes 'uncanny' and, since the son cannot bear the 'full presence' of seeing her naked, withdraws into hiddenness. None may bear this full presence without annihilation; and yet the 'deep rage' of resentment towards this withdrawal in the sufferer convicts him of an inescapable guilt. As such, "To a significant degree, melancholia provides an explanation for why theologians like Luther and Otto insisted that 'sin' is not essentially moral but ontological" (*Ibid.*, 206). However, I believe that Capp's speculative consideration is culpable of conjectured over-reliance upon the possible nature of Otto's upbringing as being typical of nineteenth century Germany (*Ibid.*, 93-101). Capp's chapter on Otto includes material on 'the thrill of fear that accompanies being beaten'. This insight is particularly overly dependent upon what Gooch notes is the "sparse evidence" (*The Numinous and Modernity*, 18) of a contemporary child-rearing manual. If these factors are indeed to account for Otto's understanding of the *mysterium tremendum* an account must also be given for the Biblical and theological precedence informing Otto's thinking.

⁶⁷⁹ Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 215

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 215-216

⁶⁸¹ Robert Minney, 'The Development of Otto's Thought 1889-1917: From *Luther's View of the Holy Spirit* to *The Holy*', *Religious Studies*, 26 (1990), 511

⁶⁸² Gregory D. Alles therefore sees Otto's self-appointed task as "a development of a science of religion as an apologetics of religion" which "made it possible for Otto partially to realize his childhood aspirations: to immunize religion... against the septic investigations of history and the natural sciences". 'Toward a Genealogy of the Holy: Rudolf Otto and the Apologetics of Religion', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume 69, Issue 2 (June 2001), 338

impervious to anthropological and scientific appropriation.⁶⁸³ Like Kierkegaard's infinite qualitative difference, the significance of the uncanny inhibits any violating Feuerbachian intimacy between theology and anthropology. Any transubstantiation of the gods into humans marks a fatal compromise, rather than perfection, of the religious impulse via a dilution of the uncanny. Hence Otto is partially retrogressive in his assessment of the sacred, as is apparent in his evaluation of ancient religion. Otto significantly takes issue with Xenophanes's pre-Feuerbachian suggestion that 'if the oxen could paint, they would paint their gods as oxen'. For Otto, this position's failure to account for the genealogy of religion endorses his own genealogy of religion in terms of the uncanny:

If the oxen strove to see their gods as oxen, humans would appear on the contrary to have had quite the opposite ambition, portraying their gods as half or whole cows, calves, horses, crocodiles, elephants, birds, fish, as marvellous hybrids, hermaphrodites and hideous beings, as weird confused forms.⁶⁸⁴

This should not be taken as Otto commending idolatry, but rather that he perceived the instinctive portrayal of primal religious imagination more honestly in the uncanny mutations of otherness than in the transmission and projection of sublimated human form.

Awed by the sublime and numinous effects of the Sphinx at Gizeh, set "throbbing in the soul almost like a mechanical reflex",⁶⁸⁵ Otto thus perceived in this dreadful monument a more authentic expression of religious feeling than in the more 'refined' deities of Greek civilisation. Hegel, on the contrary, appraised the Sphinx as exemplifying the progressive transition from primitive Egyptian to classical Greek religion. Hegel endorsed the Greek inheritance and reinterpretation of the Egyptian Sphinx from uncanny mystery to Oedipal anthropomorphism as an evolution of Spirit: "It is Greece that makes the transition to God being known as spirit inasmuch as it knows in him essentially the moment of humanity."⁶⁸⁶ Through metamorphosis into the human figure, Gooch explains, "what had remained enveloped in the darkness of an Egyptian night, sealed in the hermetic indecipherability of the hieroglyph, now steps forth into the clear light of day."⁶⁸⁷

However, Otto reads this domestication as a profound adulteration of religious intuition which initiated a discernible historical decline in religious vitality. "Where the goddesses and gods become all-too noble and all-too charming and all-too human-like, belief in them was not at its highpoint, as one would have to assume according to the doctrine of anthropomorphism."⁶⁸⁸ This demystification signifies the decadence of religion under the apparently civilising constraints of anthropomorphism. Thus, while being also a historian of the numinous, Otto defies Hegel's evolutionary historical religious optimism since what Hegel regarded as "a pivotal moment in the evolution of religion is taken

⁶⁸³ Similarly L. Philip Barnes regards Otto's assessment of religious experience as non-conceptual, in distinction to conceptual, knowledge as a defensive strategy, "an apologetic device to safeguard the autonomy of religion and protect religious truth claims from rational criticism." 'Rudolf Otto and the Limits of Religious Description', *Religious Studies* 30 (1994), 222

⁶⁸⁴ *Das Gefühl des Überweltlichen*, 215. Cited in Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 116.

⁶⁸⁵ *The Idea of the Holy*, 68

⁶⁸⁶ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: Vol. II Determinate Religion*, Appendixes, Excerpts by David Friedrich Strauss from a transcript of the Lectures of 1831, 747

⁶⁸⁷ *The Numinous and Modernity*, 117

⁶⁸⁸ *Das Gefühl des Überweltlichen*, 213. Cited in Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 116.

by Otto to be an indication of its waning influence as a vital force in Greek culture.”⁶⁸⁹ This taming of disenchanted deities then re-opens space for a renewed “re-appropriation of the strange and exotic deities of Egypt and the far East, in whom the presence of the Wholly Other was more palpable, and whose power of attraction was for that reason more compelling than the domesticated inhabitants of Olympus.”⁶⁹⁰

The Wholly Other: a *Deus Otiosus*?

Despite resonating with a modern deprivation – even despite the assimilation of the term ‘numinous’ into the wider intellectual vocabulary – it would be false to suggest that Otto entirely succeeded in rehabilitating the awareness of the Holy within the post-war mindset. Even the polemical reactions of the Neo-orthodox era to the post-war crisis constituted merely “an interruption rather than a reversal of the secularizing trend.”⁶⁹¹ As Berger describes, this “anthropology of desperation” was soon subsumed by the secular optimism of the 1960s.⁶⁹² Altizer, for example, in prescribing that Kierkegaardian *Angst* must be outgrown in correspondence with the exorcism of the numinous, identifies the Wholly Otherness of God with the death of God:

Only an alien or empty form of God could be wholly other than man and the world, for the God whose very reality and power crushes the spirit of man is a God who is estranged from his own identity as Redeemer... thus an impassable gulf appears between man and God at precisely that point when God cease to exist and to act in his redemptive form.⁶⁹³

Does the Wholly Other ultimately serve to enforce an unredemptive abyss within Godself, and consequently an impassable distance of alienation between God and humanity? Is this not also the God who must die in order for humanity to be free?

Recent trends towards adoption of an anti-realist stance toward the existence of God frees us to reform or reject our so-called numinous responses accordingly. The numinous experience itself has thus been reinterpreted independently of any objective Wholly Other reality of the *mysterium tremendum*. The result of this is that Otto’s insistence upon the numinous as something fundamentally “objective and outside the self”,⁶⁹⁴ is weakened once the experience of the *mysterium tremendum* is “accounted for independently of religious experience.”⁶⁹⁵ Otto’s strongly realist foundation for the “otherness of

⁶⁸⁹ Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 117

⁶⁹⁰ Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 116

⁶⁹¹ Berger, *A Rumor of Angels*, 24

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*, 68. Harvey Cox diagnoses that “Both philosophical existentialism and Paul Tillich’s theology are expressions of the mourning period which began with the death of the God of metaphysical theism and Western Christian civilization, but the wake is now over. That is why existentialist theologies and philosophies do not partake of the spirit of the emerging age but symbolize rather the passing of the old.” *The Secular City*, 93

⁶⁹³ *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, 87. Altizer elsewhere asserts ‘The Otherness of God as an Image of Satan’, *The Otherness of God*, 206-215

⁶⁹⁴ *The Idea of the Holy*, 11

⁶⁹⁵ Campbell, ‘Lecture XVIII: The Objective Validity of Religion’, *On Selfhood and Godhood*, 377. Campbell’s example is the possibility of the experience of *mysterium tremendum* simulated by a dream (376).

religious experience”⁶⁹⁶ is compromised once we assert that the numinous need not have its foundation in an objective *Divine* reality.⁶⁹⁷

Otto would undoubtedly resist any such ‘naturalisation’ or anthropocentrism since his account of the “feeling of dependence that characterizes numinous experience differs radically from any natural feeling of dependence. It is a difference of quality, not quantity.”⁶⁹⁸ The wholly otherness of numinous experience, which Otto describes is “as little as possible qualified by other forms of consciousness”,⁶⁹⁹ implies a qualitative purity which has itself been called into question. Furthermore, Otto’s understanding of ‘creature feeling’ as a response to the objective reality of the numinous may itself be dependent upon certain human contingencies which he has failed to recognise.⁷⁰⁰

Moreover, other anthropological appropriations of the numinous suggest that the awe of the *tremendum* may not be so Wholly Other after all. Recent times bear abundant witness to the horrifying aspects of the numinous demystified and incarnated in the atrocities inflicted by humanity upon itself. As such, rather than trembling before the awfulness of the *mysterium tremendum*, we have come to be struck with its counter in our own self-abasement before our own *tremendum*. Thus, Arthur A. Cohen writes, identifying the Holocaust as:

[T]he human *tremendum*, the enormity of an infinitized man, who no longer seems to fear death or, perhaps more to the point, fears it so completely, denies death so mightily, that the

⁶⁹⁶ Berger, *A Rumor of Angels*, 14

⁶⁹⁷ Lorne Dawson contests Otto’s inference of an objective numinous reality from a numinous experience: “Otto unacceptably seeks to secure tautologically the foundational character of a root religious feeling through assuming that the unusual character of the object inferred from the feeling is synonymous with its supernatural status.” Instead the sensation is derivable from a “something natural (though unusual).” ‘Otto and Freud on the Uncanny and Beyond’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 57:2 (1989), 289

⁶⁹⁸ Alles, ‘Toward a Genealogy of the Holy: Rudolf Otto and the Apologetics of Religion’, 325
Alles, however, disputes Otto’s claim for a quantitative difference since “Otto claims that numinous and ordinary experiences are at one and the same time analogous to one another and yet totally different, claims that are simply contradictory.” (326)

⁶⁹⁹ *The Idea of the Holy*, 8

⁷⁰⁰ According to Melissa Raphael, for example, Otto does not sufficiently appreciate the extent to which his “androcentric – indeed monosexual – structure of numinous experience” is predicated upon patriarchal religious norms (‘Feminism, Constructivism and Numinous Experience’, *Religious Studies* 30 (1994), 519). As such, Otto’s characterisation of ‘creature feeling’ as the “self abasement into nothingness before an overpowering, absolute might of some kind” (*The Idea of the Holy*, 10) further consolidates woman as more profane than man. For Raphael, women experience a greater enforced ‘creature feeling’ than men since “the Jewish and Christian traditions usually render them creatures at least three times over. Firstly, women are, like men, creatures of God. Secondly, they are creatures of men –... in Genesis 2 Eve emerges from Adam’s rib. And thirdly, women are socialized as creatures of male-controlled ideologies of femininity” (‘Feminism, Constructivism and Numinous Experience’, 518). In such a structure of dependence, women are three times abased in ‘creature consciousness’. Therefore, “women’s being is derivative in ways that male being is not – especially when God’s personality is characterized as male. By Otto’s logic then, women must feel themselves multiply profaned since creaturehood defines profanity” (‘Feminism, Constructivism and Numinous Experience’, 518). But, for Otto, profanity is specifically and uniquely contrasted with Holiness: it is not equated with, and does not thereby endorse, *dependence* itself. Otto’s concern for the creature feeling before the *mysterium tremendum* is of a quality that is not replicated in any other relation – though it may no doubt be analogously counterfeited. Raphael’s feminist critique considers the Wholly Other as a male projection, thereby relocating the numinous from objective reality to the patriarchy of male religious anthropology. If the qualitative uniqueness and objective reality of Otto’s numinous is accepted then there are no degrees of separation by which we can say that “his model of divine reality would be less ‘wholly other’ to men than to the majority of women” (‘Feminism, Constructivism and Numinous Experience’, 519).

only patent of his refutation and denial is to build a mountain of corpses to the divinity of the dead, to placate death by the magic of endless murder.⁷⁰¹

The *tremendum* of the Holocaust forms thus a caesura, an untranscendable abyss, which embodies evil in "a perfected figuration of the demonic."⁷⁰² Although humanity, in its freedom, is ultimately responsible for the *tremendum*, there is a dark point of contact between the dread and fascination of the divine and the demonic. The *tremendum* implies the possibility of the presence of evil in the *mysterium tremendum*. The *tremendum* resembles "a dead volcano, terrifying in its aspect but silent, monstrous in its gaping, raw in the entrails, a visible reminder of fire and magma, but now a quiet, immovable presence, yawning over the lives of man."⁷⁰³

But what becomes of the Wholly Other in this trembling of anthropology before the dreadful mausoleum of the death camps, "the monument of the orgiastic celebration of death"?⁷⁰⁴ Are we severed from the conciliatory meaning of a Wholly Other reality? The absurdity of Auschwitz, as Stoker suggests, "has no interpretation in the metaphysical view of meaning."⁷⁰⁵ Perhaps the Holocaust evokes not simply a human *tremendum* but also a deeply consolidated melancholy apprehension of the absent Holy itself. Perhaps the two do not exclude, but accord with each other. Is it the *absence* of the Holy in the presence of the *tremendum* which itself becomes the ineffable, the inscrutable, the elicitation of horror? "Contemporary theology cannot, and perhaps should not, come to terms with the Holocaust and other twentieth-century enormities in which the numinous has evoked less the majesty of God than the mystery of his averted face."⁷⁰⁶

Despite the analogous language, however, our own self-defiled 'creature consciousness' before the *tremendum* of Auschwitz does not seem to equate with the self-abased 'creature-consciousness' in which, for Otto, "The numen, overpoweringly experienced, becomes the all in all."⁷⁰⁷ In the human *tremendum* the numen no longer appears to reduce us to nothing since humanity experiences its own infernal demonic magnitude in place of the absent Holy. Yet Otto seems to acknowledge that the contemplation of man can itself analogously arouse "the numinous in its aspects of mystery, awfulness, majesty, augustness, and 'energy'; nay, even the aspect of fascination is dimly felt in it."⁷⁰⁸ This is what Otto reads in his rendering of the song in Sophocles's *Antigone*: "Much there that is monstrous [*ungeheuer*]; but nought is more monstrous [*ungeheuer*] than man."⁷⁰⁹ Otto affiliates "the monstrous" [*Ungeheuer*] with "the uncanny" [*das Unheimliche*]; but Harvey's English translation of *ungeheuer* as "weird" compromises the dreadful force of Otto's choice of word. More than being an expression of sheer wonder, "monstrous" [*Ungeheuer*] denotes something 'scary' [*geheuer*] and can also suggest immensity, dread, and atrocity [*Ungeheuerlichkeit*]. As such it seems to resemble something closer to what is meant by the demonic magnitude of the human *tremendum*.

⁷⁰¹ *The Tremendum* [New York: Crossroad, 1981], 19. Cited in Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, 191-192.

⁷⁰² Cohen, *The Tremendum*. Cited in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust*, 71.

⁷⁰³ Cohen, *The Tremendum*. Cited in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust*, 76-77.

⁷⁰⁴ Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust*, 69

⁷⁰⁵ *Is the Quest for Meaning the Quest for God?*, 85

⁷⁰⁶ Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, 207

⁷⁰⁷ *The Idea of the Holy*, 92

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 40

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 40

In evoking a numinous awe of itself through the terrible potency of genocide, in attempting to become as God, humanity becomes essentially atheistic. The human *tremendum* ultimately negates the *mysterium tremendum*. The experience of 'self-abasement' and dependence is alienated from that upon which it is dependent. And yet, where the human *tremendum* is concerned, there is no self-annihilation before the absolute; but rather a self-annihilation before humanity's own monumental dread of itself.

And so does the human *tremendum* not suggest that we are now more than ever in need of the Holy as it appears at its most acutely absent? Or does the *tremendum* itself imply the violence of the undeniable demonic in God? Much has been heard about love and longing in relation to God. But can the *mysterium tremendum* ultimately only satisfy a relationship of 'fascination' and 'dread' towards the God who is manifest as a 'consuming fire'? Raphael, for one, challenges the impersonal nature of the numinous in these terms:

An 'I/Thou' relationship with God of the type made famous by Martin Buber is utterly rejected by Otto as being absurdly importunate and deficient in reverence. If the seraphim of Isaiah 6 would not venture such an address, then, *a fortiori*, creatures must be screened off from direct personal confrontation with divine holiness lest they be annihilated.⁷¹⁰

Is the alienating *alterity* of the Wholly Other therefore maintained in the fear and trembling before the *mysterium tremendum*? "It has its wild and demonic forms" as Otto himself warns, "and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering."⁷¹¹ In light of the way that the alterity of the Wholly Other can seem to be preserved by fear, it is understandable how in Nietzsche the fearful and trembling human object of the *mysterium tremendum* revolts in an act of murder. Altizer endorses this emancipation from the 'fear of the Lord': "Once God has ceased to exist in human experience as the omnipotent and numinous Lord, there perishes with him every moral imperative addressed to man from a beyond, and humanity ceases to be imprisoned by an obedience to an external will or authority."⁷¹² Such 'numinous dread' seems at times to resemble something more akin to a 'demonic dread.'⁷¹³ "When awe overwhelms reverence," as Raphael warns, "all that seems to remain is Kierkegaardian 'fear and trembling': submission to the intoxicating terror of absolute divine might."⁷¹⁴ Yet is this a fair reduction of Kierkegaard's perception of God? Is such an element indigenous to Kierkegaard's understanding of the Wholly Other? Is this an adequate assessment of what Kierkegaard means by 'fear and trembling'? To some extent one may be forgiven for thinking so. But in calling this extreme conception "intoxicating", Raphael has employed a term which is a word employed by Kierkegaard as a word of caution and not an endorsement.

⁷¹⁰ *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, 92. However, Raphael earlier writes: "The awesome power of the Ottonian numen may forbid intimacy between the believer and the object of faith, but there is little despair in Ottonian theology, which is, after all, founded upon the possibility that God's call to holiness – 'For I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy (Lev. II:44)' – can be answered. Without turning God into a superhuman and humans into gods, Otto reunites God and humanity by his spiritual ontology, according to which the human senses are open to the numinous." (18)

⁷¹¹ *The Idea of the Holy*, 13

⁷¹² *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, 127

⁷¹³ "Specially noticeable is the *emāt* of Yahweh ('fear of God'), which Yahweh can pour forth, dispatching almost like a daemon, and which seizes upon a man with paralysing effect." Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 14

⁷¹⁴ *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, 78

I do not struggle with a faceless God... – Emmanuel Levinas⁷¹⁵

At the end of *Fear and Trembling* Johannes de Silentio concludes, “for God sees in secret and knows the distress and counts the tears and forgets nothing.”⁷¹⁶ Here Derrida perceives a thinly veiled reference to Matthew 6: ‘thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee’. The verse occurs three times in Matthew 6: in relation to almsgiving (v.4); prayer (v.6); and fasting (v.18). Whilst Derrida considers this in relation to economic justice,⁷¹⁷ he also significantly suggests the hidden voyeurism of the *mysterium tremendum* is never far away. “God sees me, he looks into me in secret, but I don’t see him, I don’t see him looking at me, even though he looks at me while facing me and not, like an analyst, from behind my back.”⁷¹⁸ God watches me in secret, but it is a secrecy which is declared: God discloses the fact that God is watching and it is this which induces trembling. But God does not become visible to me by my initiation into this secret. God does not come out of hiding because God is not, like the analyst, watching ‘behind my back’, or, recalling Sartre, ‘through the keyhole’. God remains invisible in the act of looking me in the face.

Such omnipresent voyeurism seemingly seeks to preserve God as the Absolute Subject who transcends all my efforts to perceive Him as object. The secret, though disclosed, voyeurism of the *mysterium tremendum* captures me in narrowing anxiety, conscious of being watched from nowhere and everywhere. This terrorist is put to death in my struggle to become a subject freed from the inaccessible mystery who captures me as inescapably object. Thus Derrida’s ethic implores, “We should stop thinking about God as someone, over there, way up there, transcendent, and, what is more – into the bargain, precisely – capable, more than any satellite orbiting in space, of seeing into the most secret of interior places.”⁷¹⁹ Similarly Levinas’s refusal to struggle with a faceless *mysterium tremendum* allows him to respond ethically to the visible face of the Other: “The presence of the face coming from beyond the world, but committing me to human fraternity, does not overwhelm me as a numinous essence arousing fear and trembling.”⁷²⁰

Whilst Levinas denounces captivity by the “invisible meshes”⁷²¹ of the numinous, Johannes Climacus – in bleak contrast to the ‘immorality of our age’ “in which individuals, as in a dream, fumble after a conception of God without feeling any terror threat”⁷²² – explains how the ‘absolute conception of God’ inevitably cages one in on all sides:

Neither the bird in its cage, nor the fish on the shore, nor the invalid on his sickbed, nor the prisoner in the narrowest cell, is so confined as he who is imprisoned in the conception of God; for just as God is omnipotent, so the imprisoning conception is also everywhere and in every moment.⁷²³

⁷¹⁵ *Totality and Infinity*, 197

⁷¹⁶ FT, 107

⁷¹⁷ ‘Tout Autre Est Tout Autre’, *The Gift of Death*, 95-98

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 91

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 108

⁷²⁰ *Totality and Infinity*, 215

⁷²¹ *Totality and Infinity*, 77

⁷²² CUP, 484

⁷²³ CUP, 432

While it has been argued that the Wholly Other is in many ways an inescapably melancholy notion, it must also be acknowledged that we have not entirely left behind the murky shores of melancholy's possible capitulation into insanity. Given the irremediable agitation before the 'terror threat', "what wonder then that the Jews assumed that to see God was to die, and the pagans thought that the God-relationship was the precursor of madness!"⁷²⁴ Likewise, Judge William elsewhere comments that "he who beholds God must die. [But] This was merely a figurative expression, the adequate and true expression is that one loses one's reason."⁷²⁵ The consistence of this strand in Kierkegaard's work is enforced in the words of Anti-Climacus:

To exist before God may seem unendurable to a man because he cannot come back to himself, become himself. Such a fantasised religious person would say (to characterise him by means of some lines): 'That a sparrow can live is comprehensible; it does not know that it exists before God. But to know that one exists before God, and then not instantly go mad or sink into nothingness!'⁷²⁶

Yet it must not be overlooked how Anti-Climacus puts these words in the mouth of "a fantasised religious person". For this 'fantasised' individual, existing before God seems ontologically unendurable: madness or annihilation present themselves as the only possibilities. But, crucially for Anti-Climacus, this self has become 'fantastic'⁷²⁷ and therefore "leads a fantasised existence in abstract infinitising or in abstract isolation, continually lacking its self, from which it moves further and further away."⁷²⁸

In other words, the religious individual has got 'carried away' by a fantastic conception of what it means to exist before God, and it is this 'fantasy' itself which must be tempered. The self "is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, which can only be done through the relationship to God."⁷²⁹ Although the relationship to God must be worked out in fear and trembling – since for Anti-Climacus "Fear and trembling signify that

⁷²⁴ CUP, 433. In reference to the pagan notion of divine madness see *Phaedrus* cap.22.

⁷²⁵ SLW, 125

⁷²⁶ SUD, 32. Similarly, at the end of *Either/Or*, Volume Two, we find in the 'Ultimatum – The Edification Implied in the Thought That As Against God We Are Always in the Wrong – (by a parson in Jutland, a friend of 'B')': "The sparrow falls to the ground – in a way it is in the right before God. The lily fades – in a way it is in the right before God. Only man is in the wrong, for to him alone is reserved that which to all other creatures was denied... to be in the wrong before God." (286)

⁷²⁷ "The fantastic [*Phantastiske*], of course, is most closely related to the imagination [*Phantasie*], but the imagination in turn is related to feeling, knowing, and willing; therefore a person can have imaginary feeling, knowing, and willing." (SUD, 30) However, the Danish word Anti-Climacus uses for 'imagination' [*Phantasi*] connotes some different nuances from the English word 'fantasy', which resounds with more immediately negative suggestions of reverie or delusion. See M. Jamie Ferreira, 'Imagination and the Despair of Sin', *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 1997, 16-34.

⁷²⁸ SUD, 32. Anti-Climacus considers that 'Infinitude's Despair Is to Lack Finitude', by which the human wills itself to be infinite without the limit of the finite, or the concrete. "When feeling or knowing or willing has become fantastic" the self loses itself in abstraction or fantasy. (30-32) Although in the above instance imagination has become fantastic in its delusions about what existing before God is like, Ferreira is keen that imagination itself can also have a beneficial role to play in a Kierkegaardian definition of faith. While imagination may embellish itself in the fantastic desire to be infinite, "it takes imagination to hold the finitized and infinitized selves in tension with each other."

Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith, 82

⁷²⁹ SUD, 29-30

we are in the process of becoming”⁷³⁰ – this fear and trembling must be careful not to ‘plunge one headlong into fantasy’. Emphatically, “To become oneself is to become concrete... Consequently, the progress of the becoming must be an infinite moving away from itself in the infinitizing of the self, and an infinite coming back to itself in the finitizing process.”⁷³¹ Although “The God-relationship is an infinitizing” it still retains the individual’s relation to the finite. The danger is that “in fantasy this infinitizing can so sweep a man off his feet that his state is simply an intoxication.”⁷³²

This involves us in a dangerous game here. Although the common conception of God has for Johannes and Anti-Climacus lacked the authentic absolute difference and concomitant ‘terror threat’, pushing one’s understanding to the opposite extreme will likewise provoke an inauthentic and ultimately anthropomorphic fantasy. On the one hand we have the anthropological myth of Feuerbachian projection which asserts that the otherness of God “is only illusion, only imagination”,⁷³³ and on the other the anthropomorphic intoxication of fantasy. Our understanding of the Wholly Other, while evading Feuerbach, is still vulnerable to the distorted fetishism of the imagination. God’s appearance as the forbidding and voyeuristic Father-projection may appear to be irreducibly Wholly Other in its transcendence, but is not so far from an unconscious anthropic projection – an illusion of the imagination and a potential sign that one has not left the melancholy aesthetic (recalling ‘A’'s fantasised divine persecution complex with which this chapter began). Whilst ‘fear and trembling’ signify the authentic God relationship, one must be vigilant against the embellishing tendencies of the fantastic towards a crude ‘daemonic dread’. Even ‘fear of the Lord’ must be learned from God.⁷³⁴ True numinous awe is found in the ‘Holy, holy, holy’.⁷³⁵

Self and Wholly Other

For Otto, “There cannot even be a searching for God unless He has previously made Himself felt”.⁷³⁶ Yet the God who becomes apparent is ‘felt’ initially in the alienated fear and trembling before that which is Wholly Other. So for Otto the primal experience of the numinous is fear: the awe and dread of the ‘tremendum’. This is as seen in the early depictions of the ‘Wrath of Yahweh’, “like stored-up electricity, discharging itself upon any one who comes too near.”⁷³⁷ However, this ‘numinous dread’ is not the only word on Holiness. Let us emphasise that ‘fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of all wisdom’. Despite the inherent primal fear of ontological extinction, despite the fact that one *imagines* that one

⁷³⁰ PIC, 88

⁷³¹ SUD, 30

⁷³² SUD, 32

⁷³³ *The Essence of Christianity*, 127

⁷³⁴ “Not only is the saying of Luther that the natural man cannot fear God perfectly correct from the stand-point of psychology, but we ought to go further and add that the natural man is quite unable to shudder (*graven*) or feel horror in the real sense of the word.” *The Idea of the Holy*, 15

⁷³⁵ *The Idea of the Holy*, 17

⁷³⁶ “The whole initiative in the birth of faith is attributable to divine action only.” ‘The Christian Idea of ‘Lostness’ Compared With Moral Depravity’, *Religious Essays: A Supplement to ‘The Idea of the Holy’*, 21

⁷³⁷ *The Idea of the Holy*, 18. This inevitably evokes the death of Uzzah from putting forth his hand to the Ark (2 Samuel 6:6-7).

will sink into nothingness before God, one is decisively *not* annihilated. Love is the moderation of divine omnipotence, as Kierkegaard expresses:

They speak of the omnipotence of God crushing a man. But it is not so; no man is so considerable that God would need omnipotence to crush him, since for omnipotence he is nothing. It is God's love which manifests itself as love even at the last instant by letting him be something for it.⁷³⁸

Even in the belief that one will be annihilated, one indirectly affirms the 'I' which fears its annihilation. Hence when Kierkegaard writes of the fear and trembling of God's Mastery over him which he sensed "when He let me feel His omnipotence and my nothingness" he implicitly testifies to a residual 'I' which *feels* its own 'nothingness'.⁷³⁹ As such, omnipotence, intriguingly and apparently contradictorily, ensures human freedom. Human independence is the gift of divine omnipotence. Rightly considered, omnipotence does not necessitate dependence, since:

[I]t must have the quality of so taking itself back in the very manifestation of its all-powerfulness that the results of this act of the omnipotent can be independent... Omnipotence alone can take itself back while giving, and this relationship is nothing else but the independence of the recipient. God's omnipotence is therefore his goodness. For goodness means to give absolutely, yet in such a way that by taking oneself back one makes the recipient independent... And this is what is inconceivable; omnipotence can not only bring forth the most imposing of all things, the world in its visible totality, but it can create the most delicate of all things, a creature independent of it.⁷⁴⁰

Despite the fear of annihilation, divine omnipotence does not crush a person, but instead withdraws in the concessive gift of independence in freedom. Hence, in Anti-Climacus' words, "to have a self, to be a self, is the greatest concession, an infinite concession, given to a man, because it is also eternity's claim upon him."⁷⁴¹ This concession is also an obligation, and freedom thereby becomes anxious. But omnipotence demands that the individual becomes potent as a self – as a subject capable of relation – since "To be *spirit* is to be *I*. God desires to have *Is*, for God desires to be loved."⁷⁴² Understood from this perspective, God as Wholly Other creates the space in which the self becomes solidified, not in isolation, but in the independence which freely relates back to God as other.

According to Christian doctrine man is not to merge in God through a pantheistic fading away or in the divine ocean through the blotting out of all individual characteristics, but in an intensified consciousness 'a person must render account for every careless word he has uttered,' [Matt. 12:36] and even though grace blots out sin, the union with God still takes place in the personality clarified through the whole process.⁷⁴³

Nevertheless, does this circuitous affirmation of self conflict with the self-depreciation which Otto sees as an authentic response to the potency of the numinous? Furthermore, although "numinous experience

⁷³⁸ 'The Joy of it' That the Weaker Thou Dost Become, the Stronger Does God Become in Thee', *CD*, 133

⁷³⁹ *PV*, 69

⁷⁴⁰ *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Dru (616). Wessel Stoker intriguingly relates this passage to Levinas' notion of the independence of the created from the Creator: itself related to the doctrine of *tzimtzum* (divine 'contraction') in Lurianic Kabbalah. *Is the Quest for Meaning the Quest for God?*, 186

⁷⁴¹ *SUD*, 21

⁷⁴² *JP* 4:4350 / *Pap. XI*¹ A 487

has both subjective and objective aspects", ⁷⁴⁴ it is not the human subject which is at the heart of Otto's writing. ⁷⁴⁵ In predilection to the modern 'self', Otto refers to 'creature-consciousness' or 'creature-feeling' as: "the emotion of a creature, abased and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures."⁷⁴⁶ It is in Abraham's words of intercession for Sodom that Otto finds this exemplified: 'Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes' (Genesis 18:27).⁷⁴⁷ When Otto describes the 'tremendum' as 'tremenda majestas' ('Overpoweringness') he explains, "in contrast to 'the overpowering' of which we are conscious as an object over against the self, there is a feeling of one's own abasement, of being but 'dust and ashes' and nothingness."⁷⁴⁸ That is to say, there is an overshadowing of the 'self' which defines the self's estimation in relation to the 'majestas'. One becomes conscious of the self in the confrontation with the 'tremendum'; but this knowledge manifests itself, in mysticism for example, as "*self-depreciation*... the estimation of the self, of the personal 'I', as something not perfectly or essentially real, or even as mere nullity, a self-depreciation which comes to demand its own fulfilment in practice in rejecting the delusion of selfhood, and so makes for the annihilation of self."⁷⁴⁹ Indirectly, this experience implies a rise in authentic creature consciousness insofar as it illuminates the 'delusion of selfhood'. However, this self-consciousness originates in the revelation from the Other, and thus it is not "merely a category of *self-valuation*, in the sense of self-depreciation."⁷⁵⁰ In other words, self-consciousness in *self-depreciation* remains contingent upon Divine revelation. One does not need to ascribe to a modern sense of 'self' to identify some sense of self-consciousness implicit in this self-abasement. Self-consciousness in *response* to the primacy of Divine revelation is not identical with asserting the primacy of the 'self' as the starting point for speculation about God.⁷⁵¹

⁷⁴³ JP 4:3887 / *Pap. II A 248*

⁷⁴⁴ "On the subjective side, it is an awareness of the nothingness of the self over against that by which it is confronted in the numinous experience. This nothingness is both ontological and valuational... Concomitant with these feelings of ontological and valuational nothingness, the *numen* is objectively and immediately apprehended as *mysterium*." Almond, *Rudolf Otto*, 67-68

⁷⁴⁵ "The human personality is not a source of wonder or religious exhilaration to Otto." Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, 89

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10

⁷⁴⁷ "But religion does not fully express itself even in this; there is yet another note that sounds still deeper and is the keynote of the triad. 'Let a man examine himself.'... For this is the most real characteristic of religion; it seeks depth in things, reaches out towards what is concealed, uncomprehended, and mysterious. It is more than humility; it is piety. And piety is experience of mystery." Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, 39-40

⁷⁴⁸ "And this forms the numinous raw material for the feeling of religious humility." *The Idea of the Holy*, 20

⁷⁴⁹ *The Idea of the Holy*, 21

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 10. This is Otto's suspicion of Schleiermacher's position whereby God's existence is inferred from my 'feeling of dependence' and hence amounts to a religious emotion which implies some primacy of the self. For Otto, however, the 'numinous' itself is primary. As such, 'creature-feeling' is cast like a shadow from the 'numinous' which "is thus felt as objective and outside the self." (11) Schleiermacher is mistaken to "teach a consciousness of the religious object only by way of an inference from the shadow it casts upon *self-consciousness*." (20)

⁷⁵¹ "The point from which speculation starts is not a 'consciousness of absolute dependence' – of myself as result and effect of a divine cause – for that would in point of fact lead to insistence upon the reality of the self; it starts from a consciousness of the absolute superiority or supremacy of a power other than myself, and it only falls back upon ontological terms to achieve its end – terms generally borrowed from natural science – that the element of the 'tremendum', originally apprehended as 'plenitude of power' becomes transmuted into 'plenitude of being'." *The Idea of the Holy*, 22

Otto's 'creature-feeling' in response to the numinous is, like Kierkegaard's 'self before God', irreducibly relational. The self-negation which Kierkegaard writes of is often the annihilation of the delusion of selfhood which is symptomatic of so much despair. Yet, while Otto fixates upon the 'awe' of the creature before the potency of the numinous, Kierkegaard is concerned with just how the 'I' will respond to the consciousness of its self-delusion in the freedom which omnipotence has granted to it. In the fear of God's omnipotence it is as if something is 'held back' by God in creating the space for the 'I' to *experience itself* in nothingness. The fear of annihilation is sensed but never actualised. There is even a self-assertive hubris in the belief that one endures the whole weight of the divine omnipotence of the *mysterium tremendum*. Indeed it is for Kierkegaard testament to God's omnipotence that God is not one who "rises in his might to crush the refractory spirits", but instead "sits quite still and sees everything, without altering a feature as if He did not exist... the infinitely powerful, the eternally unchangeable... He knows with Himself that He is eternally unchangeable. Anyone not eternally sure of Himself could not keep so still, but would rise up in strength. Only one who is eternally immutable can be in this manner so still."⁷⁵²

Nonetheless, there is a dreadful warning and threat to this freedom of the self. The alliance of Divine immutability with Divine hiddenness seems to imply an eschatological deferral of intervention, even the deferral of Divine wrath or vengeance. 'Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling' (Philippians 2:12). Or, as Derrida writes, "We fear and tremble before the inaccessible secret of a God who decides for us although we remain responsible... God is himself absent, hidden and silent, separate, secret, at the moment he has to be obeyed."⁷⁵³ God may hide but one cannot hide from God, cannot escape God's hand in the end, even in death. Indeed, the fact that God does not annihilate the one who comes into God's presence actually preserves one in inescapable fear and trembling. As Kierkegaard notes, "Precisely because thou art immortal thou shalt not be able to slip out of God's hand, hide thyself in a grave and pretend that it does not matter; and the scale according to which thou shalt be judged is that thou art immortal."⁷⁵⁴ This claim of eternity upon one asserts itself in the hostility between the self and God – a hostility that is not concluded in annihilation. It is this that is called the antagonism of *Anfechtung*: the inescapable freedom; the anxiety of relating to God; the combustible friction of spirit and spiritlessness; the struggle with the Wholly Other. This struggle is the heavy price that Kierkegaard values the God-relation at, and it is this that shall be discussed in the next chapter under the allegory of Jacob's struggle with the stranger.

[W]ith the demise of the 'God of the philosophers,' the other side of God, the shadow side, the enigmatic attacking stranger of night, has emerged to unsettle and struggle with man. Man, in turn, must contend with both his bereavement over the death of the comforting God and the onslaughts of this 'negative' side of God.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵² 'The Unchangeableness of God', *Judge For Yourself! For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourself! and Three Discourses*, 233. "This thought is terrifying, all fear and trembling." (231)

⁷⁵³ 'Whom To Give To (Knowing Not To Know)', *The Gift of Death*, 56...57

⁷⁵⁴ 'The Resurrection of the Dead is at Hand... Of the Just and of the Unjust' or 'About the Proof of the Immortality of the Soul Which Runs Thus: It is Only Too Certain – Fear It!', CD, 214

⁷⁵⁵ Susan Handelman, "'Torments of an Ancient World': Edmond Jabès and the Rabbinic Tradition", ed. Eric Gould, *The Sin of the Book: Edmond Jabès*, 56

Chapter Four: The Allegory of Yisra'el

Each man acquires the stature of the enemy with whom he wrestles. It pleased me, even if it meant my destruction, to wrestle with God.⁷⁵⁶

Everyone shall be remembered, but each was great in proportion to the greatness of that with which he *strove*. For he who strove with the world became great by overcoming the world, and he who strove with himself became great by overcoming himself, but he who strove with God became greater than all. So there was strife in the world, man against man, one against a thousand, but he who strove with God was greater than all.⁷⁵⁷

The Conflict of Exile: The Unhappy Consciousness

“The present age is the age of despair,” Kierkegaard proclaims, “the age of the wandering Jew (many reforming Jews)”.⁷⁵⁸ It is this melancholic icon of the semitic exile, the Wandering Jew, Ahasverus, that haunts the modern western consciousness as a memorial figure of God-forsakenness, alienation, nihilism and estrangement. It is an evocation that resounds from the Adamic banishment, through the homelessness of Cain, to the medieval legends and Romantic literary myths of the Jew who spurned Christ and was cursed to wander the earth, a fugitive from redemption, until judgement day. “Even in pre-exilic times,” Susan Handelman explains, “the Jew is a wanderer and a nomad who finds his truth in wilderness and desert, who encounters the Other as absence and alienation, who struggles with God through language, dialogue, dispute, and questioning – from Abraham to Job.”⁷⁵⁹ But this is a narrative portrait which has elicited stern resistance. Proliferation of this particular depiction obscures the fact that the phenomena in question does not make its entrance until the occurrence of a typically modern change in scenery. Rather than being an inherent primal archetype, the counter-argument claims that the dramatis persona of the Wandering Jew is an irreducibly historical, indeed often disastrous, emblem of modern estrangement:

Is it so difficult for the modern consciousness to admit that the idea of the divided self, of a spirit alienated from itself, is itself a recent artifact – that the image of the Jew as congenitally alien is not itself congenital but rather a historical contrivance, nourished conscientiously in the romantic notion of alienation by volunteer poets and philosophers of the nineteenth century... As Zionism was moved by the nationalism of that century, so the conception of the Jew as wanderer and alien was also nourished externally, by the same currents, at the same time; it is itself, in some good measure, alien.⁷⁶⁰

In other words, the narrative of Jewish wandering, from ancient Egypt to modern Europe, is motivated less by some innate racial anxiety than through response to extraneous pressures. That is not to deny that any spirit of exile permeates Jewish thought – a spirit evident in the Kabbalistic doctrine of *tsimtsum*, itself bearing some mark of the historical contingencies of diaspora.⁷⁶¹ Likewise,

⁷⁵⁶ Kazantzakis, *Report To Greco*, 146

⁷⁵⁷ FT, 12

⁷⁵⁸ JP 1:737 / Pap. I A 181

⁷⁵⁹ “‘Torments of an Ancient Word’: Edmond Jabés and the Rabbinic Tradition”, *The Sin of the Book: Edmond Jabés*, 57

⁷⁶⁰ Berel Lang, ‘Writing-the-Holocaust: Jabés and the Measure of History’, *The Sin of the Book: Edmond Jabés*, 201

⁷⁶¹ For example, the notion of ‘the breaking of the vessels’ involved in the act of creation, according to Lurianic Kabbalah, can be seen as “a Kabbalistic metaphor for the Jewish experience of being out of

Kierkegaard's appropriation of the Jewish exile betrays him as a connoisseur of his own intellectual times. As Pattison summarises, "the Wandering Jew symbolizes for Kierkegaard the despair of the present age, a despair rooted in its separation from its substantial ground of religion and manifesting itself in both political reform movements and philosophical nihilism."⁷⁶² One might say that the Wandering Jew of the nineteenth century is the illegitimate son of a tragic modern humanism. His wandering is, recalling Harper's phrase, a metaphysical homelessness. His despair is, in Kierkegaardian terms, an eternal sickness unto death without alleviation. "The Wandering Jew", Kierkegaard muses, "seems to have his prototype in the fig tree Christ commanded to wither away".⁷⁶³ He is a melancholy descendent of Cain in the modern semblance of *l'étranger*: the wandering lonely son of a *deus otiosus* spurned by men and gods alike.

Ahasverus, the Romantic incarnation of the Wandering Jew, has rendered his indelible mark upon modern culture, as his frequent literary curtain calls attest to. Among other appearances, as Pattison highlights, he is presented in nihilistic depiction as the protagonist of Møller's *Ahasverus* and features memorably in Shelley's 'Queen Mab' answering the question of the existence of God with the affirmative yet demonic response – not unlike 'A's melancholy proof derived from divine persecution: 'ay, an almighty God / And vengeful as almighty!'⁷⁶⁴ The legend thrives on fantasy of an exilic curse of long life as apparent in C. R. Maturin's 1820 *Melmoth the Wanderer*; "something of the Wandering Jew, something of the vampire".⁷⁶⁵ But perhaps the most stylistically revealing modern manoeuvre belongs to Edgar Quinet's *Ahasverus* in which the protagonist himself, consigned to wander until Judgement Day, eventually outlives God at the end of the world. In other words, the estranged and alienated consciousness has ironically outlasted his own damnation by surviving the death of his own judge. The Romantic hubris is evident in this effectively Nietzschean irony: man is living under the living curse of a death sentence, but at least he has outlived the God who is the protagonist of his suffering.

Kierkegaard, with typically Romantic melancholy, mused that his own tragically Mosaic mission might itself be under the curse "that, like the Wandering Jew in a beautiful legend, I should lead the pilgrims to the promised land and not enter myself, that I should guide men to the truth of Christianity and that as my punishment for going astray in my younger days I myself would not enter in but would venture only to be an omen of an incomparable future."⁷⁶⁶ It is undoubtedly a morbidly beautiful allegory and one which attests to the two threads of the aesthetic and the religious which weave the tapestry of a Kierkegaardian spirituality; but one may also struggle to reconcile it to the same Kierkegaard who appears to have discovered some deliverance through faith from the melancholy arrows of his past. Nevertheless, it is significant that Kierkegaard is willing to inscribe even himself

place and homeless at a particularly dark hour in Israel's history." Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz: the Legacy of the Holocaust*, 326

⁷⁶² Kierkegaard, *Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture*, 76. See also the outline in George Pattison's "'Cosmopolitan Faces': The Presence of the Wandering Jew in *From the Papers of One Still Living*", ed. Robert L. Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary Volume 1: Early Polemical Writings*, 109-130

⁷⁶³ Pap. I C 65

⁷⁶⁴ Cited in Pattison, *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture*, 84

⁷⁶⁵ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 136

⁷⁶⁶ JP 5:5795 / Pap. VI B 40:33

under this icon of the modern condition. As Pattison relates, "Kierkegaard's concern with the Wandering Jew is not directed towards delineating the Other, the One-who-we-are-not, but as articulating a condition that belongs to the inner destiny of all who have drunk from the bitter waters of modernity."⁷⁶⁷ The melancholic motif is further reminiscent of a particularly Romantic meditation by the young aesthete 'A' under the title 'The Unhappiest Man'.⁷⁶⁸ The phrase itself recalls Hegel's considerations of the 'Unhappy Consciousness', but in this poetic reflection it derives from the mysterious adornment on a gravestone in England. 'A', in this address, considers the meaning of the legend in light of the apparently ironic supposition that the tomb itself is empty. Could it mean that there is no such person as The Unhappiest Man? Is this tombstone essentially a monument to a secret truth? "Then we could also explain why the tomb was empty," he conjectures, "in order to signify, namely, that the unhappiest man was the one who could not die, could not slip down into a grave."⁷⁶⁹ As such, The Unhappiest Man is one who is consigned to wander perpetually in his longing to rest in the grave that awaits and yet remains continually elusive to him. As Anti-Climacus surveys, "the torment of this despair is precisely this inability to die... to be sick unto death is to be unable to die."⁷⁷⁰ And so we are returned stylistically to the despair of the present age, the despair of the age of the Wandering Jew, the withering fig tree: "the sickness unto death, this tormenting contradiction, this sickness of the self, perpetually to be dying, to die and yet not die, to die death."⁷⁷¹

Yet 'A' also has Hegel's Unhappy Consciousness in his sights:

In each of Hegel's systematic writings there is a section which treats of the unhappy consciousness. One approaches the reading of such enquiries with an inner restlessness, with a trembling of the heart, with a fear lest one learn too much or too little... Ah, happy is he who has nothing more to do with it than to write a paragraph on the subject, happier still, he who can write the next. The unhappy person is one who has his ideal, the content of his life, the fullness of his consciousness, the essence of his being, in some manner outside of himself. He is always absent, never present to himself.⁷⁷²

And so Hegel, in his happy aptitude for writing systematically about the Unhappy Consciousness, reveals himself as immunised against the very alienation he is attempting to inscribe. And so it is not actually to Hegel's enquiries that one must look for the Unhappiest Man. It is not Hegel's un-alienated depictions of alienation which generate the most anxiety in Kierkegaard's authorship; rather it is a particular figure who elicits the greatest *fear and trembling*. It is not Ahasverus but another wandering Jew whom Kierkegaard's poet (Johannes de Silentio) humbly eulogises. "Venerable Father Abraham!"⁷⁷³ And yet it is reflection upon this estranged figure that causes Silentio, in his own

⁷⁶⁷ "Cosmopolitan Faces", 129-130

⁷⁶⁸ "In *Either/Or* this figure [the Wandering Jew] is presented as the unhappiest of all persons because he could not die; consequently he is doomed to endless wandering about the earth in search of a grave of rest and peace." Sylvia Walsh, 'Patterns For Living Poetically', *Søren Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers I*, 288

⁷⁶⁹ E/O I, 180

⁷⁷⁰ SUD, 18

⁷⁷¹ SUD, 18

⁷⁷² E/O I, 181

⁷⁷³ FT, 18

estrangement from this sublimely inscrutable figure, to confess “when I have to think of Abraham, I am as though annihilated.”⁷⁷⁴

For Hegel, the Hebraic consciousness is the epitome of the alienated Unhappy Consciousness;⁷⁷⁵ and it is Abraham who typifies this above all others. According to Mark C. Taylor, both Hegel’s and Silentio’s considerations of Abraham are determined by a discernible horror. Hegel’s approach evokes a “*horror* that arises from the encounter with the terrible tension of estrangement.”⁷⁷⁶ However, whilst Hegel systematically determines the melancholy restlessness of the Unhappy Consciousness, Silentio’s horror approaches Abraham with the unspeakable fear and trembling of the “*horror religiosus*, as Israel approached Mount Sinai.”⁷⁷⁷ Otto, on the other hand, discerns in the Abrahamic creature consciousness – ‘I which am but dust and ashes’ – something more than Hegel’s abashed and alienated consciousness; instead he sees a consciousness which is profoundly “far more than, and something other than, *merely* a feeling of dependence.”⁷⁷⁸ To what extent therefore can Abraham, the “knight of faith” and not the “tragic hero” of despair (not an Ahasverus), be regarded as an emblem of the estrangement of the Unhappy Consciousness?

“Abraham is an eternal prototype [*Forbilled*] of the religious man”, writes Kierkegaard. “Just as he had to leave the land of his fathers for a strange land, so the religious man must willingly leave, that is, forsake a whole generation of his contemporaries even though he remains among them, but isolated, *alien* to them. To be an alien, to be in exile, is precisely the characteristic suffering of the religious man.”⁷⁷⁹ Throughout his writings Kierkegaard works out this estrangement in the particularly modern terms of the sometimes isolationist polemic of authentic Christianity. Spirit is precisely this estrangement from the others. Nevertheless, by invoking Abraham as the forefather of an alienated faith, Kierkegaard is sounding surprisingly, indeed ironically, harmonious with Hegel. Abraham, for Hegel, is an individual struggling against an entire creation which he encounters only in a relationship of opposition:

The whole world Abraham regarded as simply his opposite; if he did not take it to be a nullity, he looked on it as sustained by the God who was alien to it. Nothing in nature was supposed to have any part in God; everything was simply under God’s mastery. Abraham, as the opposite of the whole world, could have no higher being than that of the other term in the opposition, and thus he likewise was supported by God...

Mastery was the only possible relationship in which Abraham could stand

⁷⁷⁴ FT, 24

⁷⁷⁵ Whereas for Hegel Judaism is the alienated religion of the Unhappy Consciousness and therefore inferior to the classicism of Ancient Greece, for Vigilius Haufniensis “Judaism lies in anxiety” and it is “precisely by the anxiety of guilt that Judaism is further advanced than Greek culture”(CA, 103).

⁷⁷⁶ ‘Journeys To Moriah: Hegel vs. Kierkegaard’, *Harvard Theological Review* 70, (July 1977), 307. According to Sylviane Agacinski, “Hegel and Johannes [de Silentio] actually see Abraham in the same way: he is the figure of the stranger, but this figure is necessarily valorized by them in inverse proportion to each other.” *Aparté*, 94. Judith Butler also compares the ‘trembling’ of Abraham with that of Hegel’s bondsman in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. “How far is the bondsman’s trembling at the sight of his own freedom from Abraham’s anxiety in the face of his own potential act?” ‘Kierkegaard’s Speculative Despair’, ed. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *The Age of German Idealism*, 383

⁷⁷⁷ FT, 52

⁷⁷⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10

⁷⁷⁹ JP 4:4650 / Pap. X³ A 114

to the infinite world opposed to him; but he was unable himself to make this mastery actual, and it therefore remained ceded to his Ideal [God].⁷⁸⁰

Hegel identifies Abraham, living in alienated opposition to the world and the other, as the personification of the Hebraic Unhappy Consciousness: "He was a stranger on earth, a stranger to the soil and to men alike."⁷⁸¹ It was only "through God alone that Abraham came into mediate relation with the world",⁷⁸² a world which existed solely in opposition to him. This dreadful solitude situates Abraham as an alienated member of creation, who, by virtue of his (estranged) membership of the created order, also finds himself, in Mark C. Taylor's words, "opposed to the wholly other God upon whom he was absolutely dependent."⁷⁸³ As such, Abraham only discovers his God, his absolute, outside of himself. Abraham, "is enthralled to a Lord who is so radically different from himself that he cannot understand him at all."⁷⁸⁴ Consequently his is an Unhappy Consciousness since it is "fundamentally an *unhappy consciousness* which projects onto a transcendental and always distant God the fundamental identity of certainty and truth, of the Concept and Being."⁷⁸⁵

Likewise, Johannes de Silentio acknowledges that creation is permeated with enmity – "there was strife in the world, man against man, one against a thousand"⁷⁸⁶ – and furthermore Abraham also comes into conflict with the God who, for Hegel, was his only support. In Silentio's portrait, the image of Abraham on Moriah, before God with knife in hand ready to sacrifice Isaac, is a dreadful memorial to faith. Yet the terrible site of Mount Moriah is a monument to a greater conflict than the strife between a Hegelian Unhappy Consciousness and the estranged creation that opposes it. This faith derives its vigour from a higher struggle. It is the passion of Abrahamic faith – "the holy, pure and humble expression of the divine madness which the pagans admired"⁷⁸⁷ – which "disdains the dreadful conflict with the rage of the elements and with the powers of creation in order to strive with God".⁷⁸⁸

Although Hegel saw that God "subjugated the world to him, gave him as much of the world as he needed, and put him in security against the rest",⁷⁸⁹ Abraham, in Silentio's depiction, struggles with the God who is the actual *telos* of his faith and the origin of his promise. "Abraham was God's elect,

⁷⁸⁰ 'The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate, i. The Spirit of Judaism', *Early Theological Writings*, 187. Despite the apparent resemblance, Taylor draws attention to the fact that Hegel's *Early Theological Writings* were only published in the twentieth century, thus making any direct influence of Hegel's consideration of Abraham on Kierkegaard improbable. 'Journey's To Moriah: Hegel vs. Kierkegaard', 306

⁷⁸¹ 'The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate, i. The Spirit of Judaism', *Early Theological Writings*, 186. Mark C. Taylor notes that "Hegel's entire philosophical system is unified by a consistent dialectical progression that seeks to sublate the inauthentic form of selfhood expressed in the life of Abraham." ('Journeys To Moriah', 306) However, it should be noted that Hegel's assessment of an alienated Abraham is later contrasted by the consideration of Abraham's infinite trust/faith in God ('The Religion of Sublimity (Jewish Religion)', *Lectures On The Philosophy of Religion, Vol. II – Determinate Religion*, 424n.). Hegel refers to a community-affirming trust arising from a positive fear ('the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom', Psalm 111:10): "It is this trust, this faith of Abraham's, that causes the history of this people to carry on" (*ibid.*, 446).

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*, 187 (247)

⁷⁸³ 'Journeys To Moriah', 310

⁷⁸⁴ Judith Butler, 'Kierkegaard's Speculative Despair', *The Age of German Idealism*, 383

⁷⁸⁵ Jean Hyppolite, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, 172

⁷⁸⁶ FT, 12

⁷⁸⁷ FT, 18. See Plato, *Phaedrus* 22 and 37.

⁷⁸⁸ FT, 18

⁷⁸⁹ *Early Theological Writings*, 187

and it was the Lord who imposed the trial.”⁷⁹⁰ However, the resolution of this particular conflict is wrought in contradistinction to the mastery which determines Abraham’s relation to creation: “So there was strife upon earth: there was one who overcame all by his power, and there was one who overcame God by his impotence.”⁷⁹¹ What is meant by saying that Abraham – who conspicuously “did not challenge heaven with his prayers”⁷⁹² as he did when God threatened the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah [Genesis 18] – ‘overcomes’ God by his silence?

The nature of the victory is dependent upon the nature of the trial Silentio is describing. Perhaps it is closer to the ‘overcoming’ Luther attributes to another “knight of faith”. In his sermons on the story of the Canaanite Woman, Luther surmises that “she is no simpleton in matters of faith; she is rather a Knight of Faith who wins the victory over God himself.”⁷⁹³ Abraham’s faith in God, which for Hegel estranges him from an ever distant transcendent and unrealisable longing, is a faith which is actually manifest in immanence. “Abraham believed, and believed for this life”, Silentio implores – and this is the key to his ‘repetition’ of Isaac. “Yea, if his faith had been only for a future life, he surely would have cast everything away in order to hasten out of this world to which he did not belong.”⁷⁹⁴ Such a faith founded upon the estrangement of eschatological deferral would surely see Abraham hurrying to give up Isaac, himself, everything without anxiety, in order to hasten to the alienation-transcending ekstasis of the other world. “But Abraham’s faith was not of this sort, if there be such a faith; for really this is not faith but the furthest possibility of faith which has a presentiment of its object at the extremest limit of its horizon, yet is separated from it by a yawning abyss within which despair carries on its game.”⁷⁹⁵

It is in this “yawning abyss” between a longing for transcendence and an unconsummated transcendental in which the Unhappy Consciousness endures the weight/wait of melancholy – in which “despair carries on its game.” Yet the strangeness or *mysterium* of the Wholly Other need not be a persistent source of paralysing existential estrangement and horror. Indeed as shall be seen, faith, in Kierkegaard, is precisely the joyful and lived passion for the mystery of the absolute that can only, by definition, occur in the space of the apparent absence of God. This enigmatic struggle is resolved in a victory won by the Knight of Faith who is “great by reason of his power whose strength is impotence”.⁷⁹⁶

But Abraham himself struggles with the God who, as Derrida – can one say evoking Hegelian estrangement? – puts it “is absent, hidden and silent, separate, secret, at the moment he has to be obeyed.”⁷⁹⁷ Instead of wrestling ‘face-to-face’ like Jacob, Abraham struggles with an absent God who apparently vacates the scene at the decisive moment of revelation. It is in this apparent lacuna of divine absence that Abraham’s silence strives with God. That is why his striving with God is the victory of an absurd faith; that is why Abraham is “great by reason of his wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great

⁷⁹⁰ FT, 15

⁷⁹¹ FT, 12

⁷⁹² FT, 17

⁷⁹³ *Weimarer Ausgabe (WA)*.20.280.17. Cited in Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 112. Luther also discusses *Anfechtung* in exposition of Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac (*WA*. 5.225.5-25).

⁷⁹⁴ FT, 15

⁷⁹⁵ FT, 15

⁷⁹⁶ FT, 12

by reason of his hope whose form is madness, great by reason of the love which is hatred of oneself.”⁷⁹⁸ As Kierkegaard explains elsewhere, it is definitive of faith that it exists in the absence of that which it believes in – “faith simply means: What I am seeking is not here, and for that very reason I believe it”.⁷⁹⁹

But there are many other struggles with God to speak of; and some more indicative of insurrection than faith. And yet, in speaking of these conflicts, I wish to speak of a ‘face-to-face’ with a stranger in the allegory of Jacob striving with God: one whose secret is also founded upon a “power whose strength is impotence”, or a divinity manifest through the concession of omnipotence. But first we must speak of the tension between God and humanity that is the result of that Kierkegaardian infinite qualitative difference which asserts God as the Other, the Wholly Other, and which is both a battleground and an impassable abyss.

The Primal Enmity?

If I allow humanity to produce God, there is no conflict between God and man; if I allow man to disappear in God, there is again no conflict.⁸⁰⁰

Kierkegaard warns us that in a profound and unforgettable sense God is our “mortal enemy”.⁸⁰¹ In authentic Christianity “there is a life and death battle between God and man; God hates man just as man hates God.”⁸⁰² In this sentiment Henri de Lubac has detected a surprising affinity with the antagonism between humanity and God in the antitheism of Kierkegaard’s French contemporary Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865). Despite the divergent uses for which Kierkegaard and the anarchist Proudhon employed the human-divine tension, de Lubac identifies both thinkers as anti-Hegelians mutually opposed to any Feuerbachian suppression of the qualitative abyss between humanity and God: an abyss that essentially materialises for both in the form of a battleground.⁸⁰³

Proudhon invokes the definitive biblical image of divine-human antagonism when he observes that humanity must forever strive against God “like Israel against Jehovah, until death.”⁸⁰⁴ Yet, for Proudhon, this mutual antagonism belies an implicit kinship in which humanity and divinity each partake dialectically of attributes in opposition. With regard to the eternal God and the temporal human, Proudhon reflects, “neither is more than the other; they are two incomplete realities, which have not the fullness of existence.”⁸⁰⁵ God is the contradiction of man and yet also “the complement of man”.⁸⁰⁶ But the divine and human do not thus serve to complete one another via a Feuerbachian reparation of an illusory schism. “If God and man are opposed to each other, they are by that very fact

⁷⁹⁷ *The Gift of Death*, 57

⁷⁹⁸ FT, 12

⁷⁹⁹ UDVS, 218

⁸⁰⁰ CI, 327

⁸⁰¹ ‘The Instant’, No. 5, July 27, 1855, AUC, 157

⁸⁰² JP 4:4711 / Pap. XI¹ A 357

⁸⁰³ Henri de Lubac, *The Un-Marxian Socialist: A Study of Proudhon*, 178 (a curiously titled translation of *Proudhon et le Christianisme*)

⁸⁰⁴ *Philosophie de la misère*, volume ii, 253. Cited in de Lubac, *The Un-marxian Socialist*, 179

⁸⁰⁵ Notebook (1846). Cited in *The Un-Marxian Socialist*, 178 n.48

⁸⁰⁶ George Woodcock, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: His Life and Work*, 99

necessary to each other”⁸⁰⁷: that is, necessary in establishing the irresolvable antinomy of a primal antagonism that cannot be pacified by any Feuerbachian reconciliation of theology and anthropology. In other words, it is as definitional opposites that God and humanity remain mutually, antagonistically, and irreconcilably wholly other.

Proudhon is thus striving for a higher dialectic which depends upon this conflict. “Every step forward is a victory in which we overcome the Divine.”⁸⁰⁸ Justice, Proudhon’s fundamental concern, subordinates God to morality; but this is not simply Proudhon’s resolution of the Euthyphro dilemma in favour of ethics. All moral progress is achieved *in spite of* the transcendental. God is actually denounced as well as subordinated by human justice; hence Proudhon’s radical assertion that “God is evil” in *Philosophie de la misère* – “a phrase to startle and provoke the world.”⁸⁰⁹ Along with “Property is Theft”, this utterance indeed became a notorious and provocative statement, and one which even caused Kierkegaard to take notice of its scandal.⁸¹⁰ But Proudhon’s dramatic flair engendered an understandable misreading of and response to his position – something which the excitable intensity of his choice of words only made inevitable. As such, a few years after his aggravating utterance, Proudhon found himself explaining himself to a priest-correspondent: “My criticism of the idea of God is similar to all the criticisms I have made of authority, property, etc.; it is a systematic negation, which is meant to come to a higher affirmation, equally systematic.”⁸¹¹ Anti-theism, Proudhon insisted, was not to be conflated with atheism; rather it served a higher dialectical purpose than the emotive despair implicit in denying the *existence* of God. “Atheism thinks it is intelligent and strong”, Proudhon wrote disparagingly; in truth “it is stupid and timid.”⁸¹² Proudhon’s struggle was rather to wrestle a concept of justice free from the transcendental in order to establish it in the immanence of the human consciousness. “The central achievement of the Revolution”, both symbolically and ideologically, “was that it brought down justice from the sky to the earth.”⁸¹³

The question posed by anti-theism is a contesting of authority, not a question of Divine ontology. Proudhon confesses that “we cannot legitimately deny anything or affirm anything of the absolute; that is one of the reasons why I rule the divine concept out of morality.”⁸¹⁴ This pseudo-negative theology is sufficient reason for Proudhon to evacuate God and morality from one another’s domain. “If God is outside knowledge for us, he must remain outside practical matters... When religion, through its theology, its revelations and its cult, brings God out of the absolute, it drives man out of morality.”⁸¹⁵ In some ways for Proudhon God is so irreconcilably Wholly Other to the point of abstraction from, or irrelevance to, the fabric of human ethical existence. As anti-theists, he proclaims,

⁸⁰⁷ Letter to Guillaumin, Nov. 21st 1846. Cited in *The Un-Marxian Socialist*, 177-178

⁸⁰⁸ Proudhon, ‘On Providence’, *The System of Economic Contradictions, or, The Philosophy of Poverty [Philosophie de la misère]*. Cited in Woodcock, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, 98

⁸⁰⁹ Woodcock, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, 99

⁸¹⁰ JP 4:4911 / Pap. XI¹ A 516

⁸¹¹ To abbé X., Jan. 22nd 1849. Cited in de Lubac, *The Un-marxian Socialist*, 177

⁸¹² *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans L’Eglise*, volume iii, 179. Cited in de Lubac, *The Un-marxian Socialist*, 265

⁸¹³ D. W. Brogan, *Proudhon*, 70

⁸¹⁴ *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans L’Eglise*, volume i, 448. Cited in de Lubac, *The Un-marxian Socialist*, 265 n.1

⁸¹⁵ *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans L’Eglise*, volume iii, 302. Cited in de Lubac, *The Un-marxian Socialist*, 271 n.28

“we exclude from our morality religious consideration of the absolute, and we reject from human government all intervention by the divinity.”⁸¹⁶ Consequently the question of the existence of the absolute is a superfluous matter of supreme indifference, since the fight is not with the absolute itself but with the transcendental God of ecclesiastical Providence who preserves the unjust status quo of tyranny and poverty: in drastic terms, the God of evil. Essentially Proudhon:

makes a distinction between the Divine as it is and the Divine as the theologians have portrayed it... The absolute as such is not the enemy of man; it is the idea of God formulated by the theologians as a being outside, above, and opposed to man, that must be attacked, for this idea is the fountain of the concept of authority, and hence the enemy of true justice.⁸¹⁷

In observing something of Proudhon's transition from youthful apologist of Christian faith to the brink of a modern anarchism it is also possible to discern an early eruption of the modern war against the transcendent God of metaphysics. It is a war in which, in Proudhon's terms, “God is inexhaustible, and our contest eternal.”⁸¹⁸ There is something tangibly pragmatic, idealistic, and yet even provocatively mythical about the epic terms of Proudhon's struggle with God. He implores, “wage war on God himself, on God just the same as on the God-Humanity, on the God-Christ, wage war on all realized absolutes, on all the living and commanding gods, in the name of Justice and truth.”⁸¹⁹ The opposition between humanity and divinity is eternally irresolvable since “God and man hold each other perpetually at bay and unceasingly run away from each other.”⁸²⁰ Here is the heart of “the insoluble antinomy between God and man in Proudhon's writing.”⁸²¹

Is it our eternal destiny to struggle with God, like Jacob at Peni'el – that arcane mythology that Proudhon appeals to? Or is it now the human task to finally wrestle ourselves free of this stranger? Proudhon is not the only modern thinker to appropriate this archaic image for his own times. It is an emblem which, through Roland Barthes 1971 poststructuralist interpretation of Genesis 32:23-32, even renders itself upon the *postmodern*.⁸²² The allegory also occurs in Maurice Blanchot's virtually contemporary ‘Être Juif’. In Blanchot's consideration, Jacob's struggle with the stranger enacts a portrayal of all human confrontation with the human as much as the divine ‘Other’. In Blanchot's words, the encounter with the human Other is equally represented in this struggle since the human Other is “no less inaccessible, separate, and distant, than the Invisible Himself; [it] also confirms what is terrible about such a meeting whose outcome could only be agreement or death. Who sees God is in

⁸¹⁶ *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans L'Eglise*, volume iii, 299. Cited in de Lubac, *The Un-marxian Socialist*, 271

⁸¹⁷ *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, 205-206

⁸¹⁸ *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans L'Eglise*, volume ii, 253. Cited in de Lubac, *The Un-marxian Socialist*

⁸¹⁹ *De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans L'Eglise*, volume iii, 181. Cited in de Lubac, *The Un-marxian Socialist*, 271n.26

⁸²⁰ *Philosophie de la misère*, volume i, 391. Cited in de Lubac, *The Un-marxian Socialist*, 179

⁸²¹ Woodcock, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, 205

⁸²² See Barthes, ‘Wrestling with the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32:32-32’, ed. Graham Ward, *The Postmodern God*, 84-95. “Because of Barthes, Wrestling Jacob has become a main icon of poststructuralist critique, the text of his story one of the most versatile and necessary of critical sites.” Valentine Cunningham, ‘Roland Barthes (1915-1980): Introduction’, ed. Graham Ward, *The Postmodern God*, 74.

danger of dying. Who encounters the Other can relate himself to him by mortal violence or by the gift of the word.”⁸²³

But is this, as in Derrida, the equation or reduction of the Wholly Other to a mutual human alterity?⁸²⁴ Again, is the struggle with God, the Wholly Other, qualitatively different from my encounter with the other? Here one may think of Hegel’s dialectical struggle for self-consciousness with the other. To see God is to die; “each seeks the death of the other.”⁸²⁵ Indeed Levinas remarks that “In [Kierkegaardian] belief, existence is always trying to secure recognition for itself, just like consciousness in Hegel. It struggles for this recognition by seeking forgiveness and salvation.”⁸²⁶ But in defiant unbelief, as well as belief, consciousness seeks recognition for itself – albeit in the struggle to free itself from the gaze of a God who declares that consciousness must recognise itself through the eyes of a Wholly Other. Could such an analogous struggle for a consciousness emancipated from the gaze of the LORD be read in Hegel, as some have suggested?⁸²⁷

According to Hegel’s dialectic of ‘Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage’, self-consciousness confronted by another self-consciousness strives to overcome what it perceives as the threat of “this otherness of itself.”⁸²⁸ But in Hegel this threat is reciprocal. A shared mutuality of self-consciousness threatens to disrupt the sovereign subjectivity of each ‘being-for-self’. And so the conflict begins with a gaze: “They *recognize* themselves as *mutually*

⁸²³ ‘Être Juif’, *L’Entretien infini*, [Paris: Gallimard, 1969] 188. Cited in Susan Handelman, ‘Torments of an Ancient World: Edmond Jabès and the Rabbinic Tradition’, *The Sin of the Book: Edmond Jabès*, 56

⁸²⁴ Blanchot remained committed to his form of atheism. “[T]he name of God finds its way back into Blanchot’s writing. It does so, however, not as evidence of a tardy abandonment of atheism, but on two conditions: first, that what it names without naming is not the God of Christianity but the God of the Talmud, and that the name of God, no sooner written, is immediately retracted and re-(de)named as that of an Other.” Leslie Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*, 83-184

⁸²⁵ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, B, IV, 187, p.113.

⁸²⁶ ‘Existence and Ethics’, 30

⁸²⁷ Jean Hyppolite has commented that “God is the master and man is the slave. A form of alienation that reduces man to an existential nothingness results in a humiliation of man which, as Feuerbach noted, might have serious moral consequences.” *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, 133. Among others, Henri de Lubac suggests that the insurrection of the unhappy slave consciousness can be read as symbolising the insurrection of an aggressive will-to-decide in atheist humanism by which God appears as “an antagonist, the enemy of his dignity”. *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, 23. Such readings in the light of modern humanistic atheism aside, J. B. Ballie’s explanatory footnotes to his translation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* suggest that the formula of ‘Lordship and Bondage’ identifies the feudal hierarchy of medieval Catholicism specifically. However, John W. Burbidge has challenged this explicitly contingent reading, instead arguing that the ‘Unhappy Consciousness’ cannot be historically or even religiously specified exclusively. Hence Burbidge’s more expansive reading that “the experience of the unhappy consciousness is universal. It is a perennial possibility in human nature, reappearing in the lives of individuals even in our day.” “‘Unhappy Consciousness’ in Hegel: An Analysis of Medieval Catholicism?”, ed. Jon Stewart, *The Phenomenology of Spirit Reader: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, 205. It is also worth noting here David H. Hamlyn’s contention that Hegel’s master-slave dialectic is not, however, a work of social analysis as is often supposed: “it has no particular connection with any actual cases of human relationships. It is rather a metaphysical exposition of certain aspects of the concepts of a person and personal relationships as they arise from Hegel’s view of the self and self-consciousness... It might be said that the master-slave relation presents a very special case. Why should we extrapolate from it to the conclusion that self-knowledge presupposes something about how one stands to others?” ‘Self-Knowledge’, ed. Theodore Mischel, *The Self: Psychological and Philosophical Issues*, 186-187

⁸²⁸ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, B, IV, 180, p.111

recognizing one another.”⁸²⁹ Hegel thus describes a struggle based upon a recognition of the reciprocity of the other: based on an antagonistic and recognised mutuality between the gaze of the self and the gaze of the other, and not what Derrida calls “this abyssal dissymmetry”⁸³⁰ between the gaze of the *mysterium tremendum* (the Wholly Other) and one’s own. The threat of annihilation is mutual, and not founded upon the ontological oppression of the individual by the absolute: “they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle.”⁸³¹

Yet it is through this struggle that the bondsman “has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord.”⁸³² Hegel seemingly cannot avoid evoking the God of the Old Testament when he declares “fear of the lord is indeed the beginning of wisdom”.⁸³³ But it is a struggle in which the initial threat of annihilation is mutual for each consciousness. In the struggle with God, however, the risk of annihilation is radically one-sided. The human-divine paradigm is a struggle that takes place over the abyss of an infinite qualitative difference. How can such a struggle across an abyss take place at all? How can one struggle with someone infinitely different, someone elusively Wholly Other, without some concession of the absoluteness of this otherness? For how, evoking the question at the heart of the struggle of Kazantzakis’s writings, can flesh wrestle with spirit?

Here one can return to the motif of Jacob’s night struggle with his enigmatic antagonist. Does Jacob not discern the face of God at Peni’el – the face that none may see and live? Jacob wrestles all night with a figure who refuses to reveal his name. And yet Jacob, after receiving the blessing of the stranger, declares ‘I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved’ (Genesis 32:30). Jacob was indeed blessed (Gen. 32:29) to have wrestled with God in the flesh, face-to-face, despite the threat of annihilation. Surely God as the Wholly Other cannot be grasped, and especially not in the scandalous tangibility of such a struggle, unless God has become so incarnated in the divine gift of Godself to be struggled with. While the threat of annihilation is not reciprocal, one sees a God who, taking in some enigmatic way the form of a man, actually partakes, to a degree, of this human mutuality. The possibility of the struggle relies, not upon the sublimation of flesh into spirit, but upon God allowing Godself to be struggled with; indeed, God’s gift of Godself in the struggle. The corporeality of the stranger is the divine concession to Jacob: the gift of transubstantiation which makes apprehension possible. It is possible also to read in this allegory how the struggle with God does not necessarily entail knowing God in Godself, but to know *oneself before God*. As such, Jacob is asked for his name: his identity is questioned only for the stranger to rename him *Israel* (‘struggling with God’).⁸³⁴ Subsequently, the divine name refuses to reveal itself to desire (as the face does not disclose itself to Moses) but instead responds in a question which preserves the *mysterium*: ‘Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?’ (Gen. 32:29).

⁸²⁹ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, B, IV, 184, p.112

⁸³⁰ *The Gift of Death*, 28

⁸³¹ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, B, IV, 187, p.113-114

⁸³² *Phenomenology of Spirit*, B, IV, 194, p.117

⁸³³ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, B, IV, 195, p.117-118 (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; Psalm 111:10)

⁸³⁴ To see God is to die, but, paradoxically, as Elliot Wolfson maintains, “one would do well to consider the etymology of the word ‘Israel’ as ‘one who sees God’.” *Through a Speculum That Shines*, 50

For Hegel there is an implicit and reciprocal risking of one's life in the contest with the other.⁸³⁵

However, Jacob's struggle with God reveals the divine grace which preserves life: the perceived threat of annihilation which is never actualised, the omnipotence which is conceded. Surely this concession of omnipotence does not extend to the threat of divine annihilation; surely, in other words, Jacob could not have *killed God*? The allegory of this mysterious struggle forms an interesting focal point for the spiritual treatise of sixteenth century Spanish mystic Fray Juan de los Angeles, *The Loving Struggle Between God and the Soul*. Although no one can kill God, except in one's own heart Kierkegaard tells us,⁸³⁶ Fray Juan de los Angeles reads in this enigmatic contest a divine concession in which God becomes vulnerable to being wounded by love.⁸³⁷

Another consequence of the struggle with God is that Jacob, through being subsequently reconciled to his brother Esau, is freed from the fear of the other.⁸³⁸ As Juan de los Angeles recounts:

And the angel said to him: *Hereafter your name shall not be Jacob* (which means fighter) *but Israel* (which means Prince of God), that you may lose your fear of Esau *for it is with God that you have been wrestling, and he who has prevailed over God shall fear no man.*⁸³⁹

One who fears God should fear no other. Yet, in the nineteenth century, Kierkegaard occupies a time when by his own admission – and this is something he strives to rehabilitate – the idea of God does not thrive on the same archaic fear that it once did. “Christianity was originally represented (by the preachers) in the fear of God; nowadays it is represented (by the preachers) in the fear of man”.⁸⁴⁰ The antagonism is reversed – as in Proudhon's advocacy of humanity's obligation to fight back, to become the protagonist of the eternal struggle. And yet Kierkegaard insists that “To kill God is what man cannot do, what he can do is to kill the thought of Him... so as to become oneself the master instead of the bondservant”.⁸⁴¹

Specifically Kierkegaard is writing in reference to the parable of the husbandmen who plotted “Let us kill the son, and then the vineyard will be ours”⁸⁴²; nevertheless is it possible to read the Hegelian dialectic between the lines? “Is not this also a way of desiring to add a cubit unto one's stature – by getting the proprietor killed, or the thought of him, so as to become oneself the master instead of the bondservant?”⁸⁴³ In such rebellious “presumption”, as Kierkegaard reveals, one fails to identify the extent to which one is implicitly dependent upon “the token that God is the strongest, the token that he *wills* to have God against him.”⁸⁴⁴ Hence, this presumptuous consciousness continues to define itself through the recognition of the very other it strives to deny, thereby compounding itself deeper into the very dependent structure of consciousness it hopes to free itself from: “for it would be

⁸³⁵ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, B, IV, 187, p.113

⁸³⁶ Kierkegaard, ‘The Anxiety of Presumption’, CD, 69

⁸³⁷ *The Loving Struggle*, ‘Dedication’, xviii

⁸³⁸ ‘I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me.’ Genesis 33:10

⁸³⁹ *The Loving Struggle*, 16

⁸⁴⁰ JP 4:4904 / Pap X5 A 40

⁸⁴¹ Kierkegaard, ‘The Anxiety of Presumption’, CD, 69.

⁸⁴² CD, 69

⁸⁴³ CD, 69. See also WL, 119: “men find this bondservice to be a burdensome imposition and are more or less openly intent upon deposing God in order to enthrone man.”

⁸⁴⁴ CD, 70

adding an immense cubit unto his stature if a man face to face with God were able to deny God".⁸⁴⁵ In this insurrection, independence is not the received blessing of a divine concession, since "no blessing goes with stolen goods".⁸⁴⁶ The self-abnegation of Jacob wrestling with God is nothing compared to the dependence of this presumption that *wills* to have God against him. "If the God-fearing man 'halts upon his thigh' [Genesis 32:31] after having striven with God", Kierkegaard writes, "truly the unbeliever is inwardly annihilated."⁸⁴⁷

But here is the sort of implicit dependence which Proudhon himself identifies in the crude atheism which earns his rebuke. What most endangers God for Kierkegaard is modernity's indifference to the radical tensions of the God-relationship. In Kierkegaard's day the *mysterium tremendum* is a *deus otiosus* already declining in the apostasy of bourgeois Christendom and the hubris of Enlightenment reasoning. Consequently Levinas observes that "The Kierkegaardian God is revealed only to be persecuted and unrecognized, reveals himself only in the measure that he is hunted."⁸⁴⁸ This God is the God endangered by atheism and exiled by human wisdom into appearing on the fringes of modernity only as 'enigma', as 'paradox', as a 'persecuted truth'.⁸⁴⁹ Kierkegaard presents us with "a truth persecuted in the name of a universally evident truth, a meaning paling into meaning, a meaning thus already past and driven out".⁸⁵⁰ The Truth of the absolute is hunted into exile by the truth of the universal, emancipated from fear and bondage of the Lord. As Proudhon's defiant pledge declares: "Retreat God, for today, cured of your fear and become wise, I swear, with my hand stretched out towards the heavens, that you are nothing more than the executioner of my reason, the spectre of my conscience".⁸⁵¹

In the anxious lacuna of such divine retreat, or exile, Kierkegaardian belief, as Levinas describes it, is consigned to exist as the inexpressible secret of an incommensurable subjectivity: "This incommunicable burning, this 'thorn in the flesh', testified to subjectivity as a *tension over itself* [*tension sur soi*]."⁸⁵² In turn, the 'thorn in the flesh' that is belief in a persecuted truth signifies a subjectivity itself exiled and persecuted by 'the world'. Faith discovers a melancholy solidarity with the truth of a God who is likewise manifest in suffering exile. Here one recalls Elie Wiesel's description of the melancholy of Rebbe Barukh of Medzebozh whose "obsession was that all men are strangers in the world. And that God too, in exile, dwells as a stranger in His own creation."⁸⁵³ Hence, Levinas writes, "*Belief always exists in relationship with a suffering truth...* the Relation with a Person who is both present and absent, with a humbled God who has suffered and died, and brought despair to those he has

⁸⁴⁵ "[O]r it might even be so that perhaps it is God who stands in need of man (as the wisdom of this age has understood it – if such a thing can be understood)... in order to understand Himself." CD, 70

⁸⁴⁶ CD, 70

⁸⁴⁷ CD, 70

⁸⁴⁸ 'Enigma and Phenomena', *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 71

⁸⁴⁹ 'Enigma and Phenomena', 71. "...the idea of a truth that manifests itself in its humility, like the still small voice in the biblical expression – the idea of a persecuted truth". 'A Man-God?', *entre nous*, 55. This term is also employed by Levinas in his consideration of Kierkegaard in 'Existenz and Ethik' (published in German in 1963 and reprinted in *Noms propres*, 102-103. An English translation appears as 'Existence and Ethics' in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, pp. 26-38).

⁸⁵⁰ 'Enigma and Phenomena', 71

⁸⁵¹ *The System of Economic Contradictions, or, The Philosophy of Poverty*. Cited in Woodcock, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, 98

⁸⁵² 'Existence and Ethics', *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, 27

led to salvation.”⁸⁵⁴ However, the suffering truth does not simply endure banishment to the periphery by the universal truth of the spirit of modernity. Rather it is a truth which has freely *chosen* to submit to crucifixion, humiliation, death. Hence the relation to this truth is an *imitatio christi*: a following in the bloody tracks of the saviour, partaking of a degree of divinity’s exile from the world. Yet this discipleship involves the pursuit of a mysterious paradoxical truth that continually eludes the consummation of the believer’s understanding. Even the imitation of divine suffering involves “the crucifixion of one’s understanding”.⁸⁵⁵ It is following one who is absent – “faith simply means: What I am seeking is not here, and for that very reason I believe it.”⁸⁵⁶ Or as Levinas describes, “Belief stands in the midst of this conflict between presence and absence – a conflict which remains for ever irreconcilable, an open wound, unstaunchable bleeding.”⁸⁵⁷ This is part of faith’s passionate inwardness – what Levinas identifies as the inevitable “isolation of the individual relationship with the being to which, for Kierkegaard, no other kind of relationship is possible: that is to say, with God.”⁸⁵⁸ It is this, for Levinas, which causes the passion of faith to exhibit a certain violence in the individual’s severance from Others [*Autrui*] in pursuit of the lonely and crucifying quest for the elusive “crucified truth”.⁸⁵⁹

Wounds From a Burning Arrow

In an unsuspecting sense, Levinas is perhaps not so wrong to detect an inherent violence within Kierkegaardian subjectivity. Yet the violent severance of the suffering truth that “does not open us out

⁸⁵³ *Four Hasidic Masters*, 44

⁸⁵⁴ ‘Existence and Ethics’, 29

⁸⁵⁵ JP 4:4375 / Pap. X¹ A 478

⁸⁵⁶ UDVS, 218

⁸⁵⁷ ‘Existence and Ethics’, 29

⁸⁵⁸ ‘Existence and Ethics’, 29

⁸⁵⁹ ‘Existence and Ethics’, 30. There are certain problems with Levinas’s impression of Kierkegaard, though a thorough discussion of the issues would cause a deviation from our path. Suffice it to say that his reading of Kierkegaard is dominated by the extent to which Levinas is particularly scandalised by *Fear and Trembling*. Its depiction of the *akedah* strikes him, in Mark Dooley’s words, as “nothing less than a violent abomination, an act of unrestrained religious fanaticism.” *The Politics of Exodus*, ‘Introduction’, xvii. According to Dooley’s counter-claim, Levinas overlooks “the fact that Kierkegaard does not simply demand a ‘suspension of the ethical,’ but a ‘teleological suspension of the ethical.’ ... The aim of the teleological suspension of the ethical is to reinforce the fact that our ethical codes are ineluctably open to revision, since they are the formulations of existing individuals who are always in the process of becoming, forever subject to the vagaries of time and contingency.” *Ibid.*, xvii-xviii. But, more fundamental than that, Levinas fails to place *Fear and Trembling* in its appropriate, indeed *pseudonymous*, context. It is this overshadowing of the entire corpus which allows Levinas to virtually universalise the teleological suspension of the ethical into a totalising Abrahamic-Kierkegaardian subjectivity. Yet on one level this is a contradiction of what Silentio perceives as the anomalous and inscrutable singularity of Abraham’s near-sacrifice in which the ethical is regained. I suspect that what terrifies Levinas is the possible repetition of Abraham as a legitimised universal teleological suspension of the ethical in the violent fanaticism of a Kierkegaardian subjectivity. Indeed, as *The Book On Adler* suggests, a similar fear of subjective fanaticism troubled Kierkegaard himself. Levinas is altogether nervous of giving the sort of primacy he sees Kierkegaard giving to any private God-relation at the exclusion of the neighbour. But Merold Westphal argues that “this can hardly be an objection against Kierkegaard, who includes an essay on 1 John 4:20 [in *Works of Love*] on the impossibility of loving God without first loving the neighbor, and who presents the God who is to be loved first precisely as the God who tells me I must love my neighbor.” ‘Commanded Love and Divine Transcendence in Levinas and Kierkegaard’, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl, *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 215

to others, but to God in isolation”⁸⁶⁰ does not tell the whole story of Kierkegaardian passion. Indeed, by believing in the persecuted truth, the individual must drink the bitter cup that is its share of Truth’s exile from the world. Yet here Levinas has overlooked a further violence, a deeper etymology for the ‘thorn in the flesh’ in Kierkegaard. The individual is further isolated by the residual enmity between self and God which cannot be done away with, which gnaws like a ‘thorn in the flesh’ – the suffering of relating to something Wholly Other. The Truth which the isolated individual struggles to sustain a relation with is a Truth with which the individual is always in some conflict. Spirit may mean to be not of ‘the world’, but there is no one in the whole world who is yet fully transfigured as spirit. God wages war against humanity insofar as spirit and spiritlessness are in constant antagonism. As such, to be human and to be in this world is to be in conflict, not only within oneself, but also with God.

For Kierkegaard, to become spirit means finding oneself out of one’s element in spiritlessness: “Every creature is at its best in its own element, can properly only live in its own element, the fish cannot live on the land, nor the bird in the water – and to require spirit to live in the environment of spiritlessness means death, means to die slowly in agony, so that death is a blessed relief.”⁸⁶¹ Evoking similarly Kierkegaardian imagery, Otto writes that “man is like a fish gasping on the sand, outside the natural element in which he should function and have his being, as long as he is outside God and faith.”⁸⁶² Yet Kierkegaard is emphatic that, as far as the world is concerned, one’s natural element is spiritlessness. To become spirit does not mean to be transported to the comfort of one’s homeland, but to undergo transmutation in the crucible of spiritlessness: “Spirit is fire. From this comes the frequent expression: As gold is purified in fire, in the same way the Christian is purified.”⁸⁶³

In describing such moments as ‘spiritual trial’ [*Anfægtelse*],⁸⁶⁴ Kierkegaard is anxious to rehabilitate an old tension that has declined in a modern Christendom which has lost sight of the infinite qualitative difference, or the primal antagonism, between humanity and God. Hence

⁸⁶⁰ ‘Existence and Ethics’, 30

⁸⁶¹ ‘The Midnight Cry’, April 9, 1855, AUC, 65

⁸⁶² ‘The Christian Idea of ‘Lostness’ Compared With Moral Depravity’, *Religious Essays: A Supplement to ‘The Idea of the Holy’*, 19

⁸⁶³ JP 4:4355 / Pap. XI² A 41

⁸⁶⁴ Hong’s translation of *Anfægtelse* by the term “spiritual trial” rightly evokes the inherent tension of spirit. However, Walter Lowrie writes in his completion of David Swenson’s translation of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, “Commonly I translate this word by ‘trial of temptation’, but this does not quite serve to make it clear that what we are dealing with is the repellent temptation, not the enticement of pleasure.” (569 n.8). As such he preserves Swenson’s *Anfechtung* throughout. Though this is more of a cognate rather than a translation I think it is preferable since it preserves both the etymology of the word and the genealogy of the category. As Johannes Climacus notes, “Within the sphere of religious suffering there lies the special type of religious conflict the Germans call *Anfechtung* [*Anfægtelse*], which category finds its determination only in this connection.” (CUP, 410). Although it denotes a ‘special type of religious conflict’ the word is not always used so technically by Kierkegaard (especially in the journals), and appears under slightly different pseudonymous permutations (especially in *Fear and Trembling*). As Niels Thulstrup warns, “The different meanings in which SK uses the word trial [*Anfægtelse*] show the difficulties of formulating a definition in which due concern can be paid to both the contents of the term and its range.” (‘Trial, Test, Tribulation, Temptation’, *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Volume 16*, 116. See this work for a concise exploration of the uses of the term in Kierkegaard’s corpus.) Nevertheless, it is Kierkegaard’s richest use of the word as appropriate to the God-relationship that we are most concerned with: “trial as a threat against Christian faith... often close to: offense.” (*Ibid.*, 115). These understandings “point in one specific direction, namely towards the original, etymological, and figurative sense of the word: attack, offensive struggle – and the difficulties which man enters in the state of trial.” (*Ibid.*, 116-117)

Kierkegaard presents God as a Truth in exile hoping to reawaken others to the distance he senses between the modern world and God. “I am like a chaplain in a monastery, a spiritual adviser to the solitary”, Kierkegaard laments, “Spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*] is literally never spoken of anymore.”⁸⁶⁵ No wonder Kierkegaard, in the waning light of this particular *deus otiosus*, seems anxious to rehabilitate the fear and trembling of the *mysterium tremendum* for an age already beginning to be recipient of rumours of the death of God. Kierkegaard strives to reinvigorate a primal struggle – but one in which God, and not the violence of atheism or the will-to-deicide, is the prime antagonist: the stranger who confronts at Peni’el.

In its literal sense Juan de los Angeles reads God’s concession to Jacob as a submission which dispels fear; “But in its spiritual and mystical sense what transpires clearly to me is a struggle of a different kind, a more admirable struggle wherein man really and truly prevails over God, and man conquers God.”⁸⁶⁶ In adopting the allegory of Jacob’s wrestling for benediction as its motif, *Anfechtung/Anfægtelse* is revealed as an assault by God in which God wills us to fight back. But it is not by atheism, antitheism, or epic Hegelian struggle between self and other, that the authentic struggle with God is waged.⁸⁶⁷ Instead, “Only to love is it given to struggle with God, and God in his love wants nothing more than to be loved in return”.⁸⁶⁸ These words recall Kierkegaard’s emphasis upon the divine concession of freedom and identity: “God desires to have *Is*, for God desires to be loved.”⁸⁶⁹

It is Jacob’s conflict with the angel, de Lubac explains, which embodies the human-divine encounter: “It is the condition of all greatness, and it may be the means – but here Proudhon would no longer follow us – of a purer submission.”⁸⁷⁰ It is in the self-offering of this struggle that God submits in apparent compromise of the divine nature, as de los Angeles renders ‘offensively’ explicit: “God himself, the omnipotent, the impassible God is wounded in his heart by the gentle, blushing, loving gaze of the soul.”⁸⁷¹ But in this war of love, this “purer submission”, this wounding is mutual – as with John of the Cross, God’s incandescent touches “like a fiery arrow strike and pierce the soul and leave it wholly cauterized with the fire of love. And these are properly called the wounds of love”.⁸⁷² This “purer submission” suggests the ecstasy with which Teresa of Avila received the holy burning arrow plunged into her heart by an angel. It is the stigmatic passion of St. Francis “who, sensing God looking

⁸⁶⁵ JP 6:6459 / Pap. X¹ A 586. Likewise Johannes Climacus iterates how ‘we scarcely ever hear a word about it’, except when it is conflated with mere temptation [*Fristelse*]. CUP, 410.

Louise Carroll Keeley writes, ‘Not speaking about it intensified the aloneness of the experience. Save for the experienced guides of the older devotional literature, one rarely met with any assistance.’ ‘Spiritual Trial in the Thought of Kierkegaard’, ed. Robert Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 313

⁸⁶⁶ *The Loving Struggle*, 17

⁸⁶⁷ Indeed, Kierkegaard notes the irony that “the tendon which God touched in wrestling with Jacob is generally called ‘*tendo Achillis*’ by physicians [though the sciatic nerve may be more accurate], and thus it bears the name of paganism’s most powerful and valiant hero; [but] paganism never came in such close contact with the divine that its physical strength suffered under it, and yet it must be said that Jacob was far more powerful.” JP 3:3060 / Pap. II A 545

⁸⁶⁸ *The Loving Struggle*, 17

⁸⁶⁹ JP 4:4350 / Pap. XI¹ A 487

⁸⁷⁰ *The Un-Marxian Socialist*, 275

⁸⁷¹ *The Loving Struggle*, 28-29

⁸⁷² ‘Spiritual Canticle’, Stanza I, *The Complete Works*, Vol. II, 35

lovingly at him, was left wounded in his hands, his feet, his heart.”⁸⁷³ Evoking Teresa and Isaiah, John of the Cross describes such love as a living flame: “the soul will become conscious of an assault upon it made by a seraph armed with a dart of enkindled love, which will pierce the soul, as it were an enkindled coal.”⁸⁷⁴ Such wounds of a struggle of love may also be described as thorns in the flesh.

Thorns in the Flesh

I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such a one caught up to the third heaven... how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful to utter. – 2 Corinthians 12:2...4

[I]f someone suddenly starts to think of the dangers of the lofty life the text speaks about, that one is overwhelmed with anxiety, just as when someone has held in his hand and played with a deadly weapon without knowing that it was deadly. – Kierkegaard⁸⁷⁵

God’s upbringing, as described by Kierkegaard, is of such severity that one is fated to an unrelieved thorn in the flesh which forces one “outside of the universally human” and into the salvific God-relationship.⁸⁷⁶ Though one may pray for relief, the thorn signifies the passion of the God-relationship itself: “If by having the thorn removed I would come to feel my communion with God less intensely, then let it remain.”⁸⁷⁷ Here Kierkegaard is close to Luther’s identification: “The tribulation of faith was that thorn which St. Paul felt, and which pierced through flesh and spirit, through soul and body.”⁸⁷⁸ Or as Johannes Climacus has it, “What evidence did the Apostle retain to assure him of the reality of his experience? A thorn in the flesh – that is, an experience of suffering.”⁸⁷⁹ Here one encounters the full force of the idea that the God-relationship causes a deep wound – that entering into the service of the unconditioned means suffering. It is here that the threat of the *mysterium horrendum* is most acute since it is at this moment that the divine and demonic may bear the closest resemblance to one another. As Kierkegaard writes in a rather strange comment on Paul’s thorn in the flesh:

When an angel of darkness arrays himself in all his terror, convinced that if he just makes Paul look at him he will petrify him, when at the outset he jeers at Paul for not having the courage to do it, then the apostle looks at him, does not quickly shrink back in anxiety, does not strike him down in terror, does not reconnoiter with hesitant glances, but looks at him fixedly and steadfastly. The longer he looks the more clearly he perceives that it is an emissary of God who is visiting him, a friendly spirit who wishes him well.⁸⁸⁰

To become involved with God thus incorporates the danger of involving oneself with something infinitely other – with the other life. In daring to enter into the God-relationship one encounters *Anfechtung*: “the opposition of the absolute itself in the individual’s attempt to relate himself to it

⁸⁷³ *The Loving Struggle*, 103

⁸⁷⁴ ‘The Living Flame of Love’, Stanza II, 8, *The Complete Works*, Vol. III, 44

⁸⁷⁵ ‘The Thorn in the Flesh’, EUD, 327-328

⁸⁷⁶ JP 4:4654 / Pap X³ A 182

⁸⁷⁷ JP 4:4644 / Pap X² A 246

⁸⁷⁸ *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, DCXLIV, 273

⁸⁷⁹ CUP, 407

⁸⁸⁰ ‘The Thorn in the Flesh’, EUD, 342

absolutely.”⁸⁸¹ Kierkegaard’s warning must be heeded: “O, so strenuous is the true God-relationship that it is always characterized by a tendency toward madness.”⁸⁸²

The melancholic, for Plato, was inclined towards frenzy and ecstasy,⁸⁸³ but the biblical theophany contains something alien to this tradition. In Paul’s famous vision, his ‘thorn in the flesh’, the ascension is furtive and enigmatic. The secrecy of Paul’s revelation resides in the fact that he heard things which were “unspeakable”; not unpronounceable, but “not lawful to utter.” Paul belongs more to the tradition of Hebraic prophet than Neoplatonic contemplative.⁸⁸⁴ This recalls Elie Wiesel’s account of the melancholy of The Holy Seer of Lublin (1745-1815); a sorrow he describes as “a black fire.”⁸⁸⁵ “Other Masters were endowed with powers, but none with his vision”, we are told, “In his early youth he prayed to God to take it away; he found it a burden, and depressing. He saw too much, too far. But his plea was not answered.”⁸⁸⁶ But perhaps more troubling than this figure is the uncertain fluidity between prophecy and melancholia exemplified by the Kabbalist Shabbatai Zevi (born 1626), the notorious ‘false messiah’ of seventeenth century Europe. Despite cultivating a significant following, Zevi was finally more notorious for his defection to Islam than his esoteric theology – which itself gave mystifying expression to his depression in terms of a cosmic strife between the Messiah and the Serpent and eventually extended to a contrived mystical defence for the Messiah’s apostasy. However, what is of most interest here is his relation to his prophet Nathan of Gaza, to whom, as Wolf Lepienes relates, Zevi first came as a patient collapsing beneath the immensity of his holy burden and suffering from the ecstasies and self-doubts of manic depression:

In Nathan of Gaza’s view, the most important dissonances arose from Sabbatai’s vision of himself as the Savior, which he did not dare yield to for fear he was wrong; they also stemmed from Sabbatai’s exaltations, which arose during his manic-depressive periods, and also from the apostasy of the Messiah.⁸⁸⁷

More pertinent to Kierkegaard’s age, however, was the contemporary enigma of clergyman Adolph Peter Adler’s claim to be the recipient of a direct revelation from Christ. Adler, apparently “under the direct outpouring of the Spirit”,⁸⁸⁸ professed to have been instructed to burn all his previous Hegelian works and receive the revealed truth about the origins of evil. On 12 June 1846 Adler published four books detailing his revelation. Kierkegaard purchased these volumes almost at once and

⁸⁸¹ Joel Robert Smith, *The Dialectic of Selfhood in the Works of Søren Kierkegaard*, Ph.D. diss. Vanderbilt University, 69

⁸⁸² JP 4:4672 / Pap X4 A 386

⁸⁸³ *Phaedrus*, 244d

⁸⁸⁴ The biblical prophet, inspired by the spirit of prophecy, often resembles a madman (*shoteh*) compelled by the spirit which comes close to madness (*Ruach Shtus*). “As the Talmud puts it: ‘Who is deemed a *shoteh*? One who goes out alone at night; who sleeps in the cemetery; who tears their clothes.’ Later the Talmud adds: ‘One who destroys all that is given to them’ (*Hagigah* 3b).” Howard Cooper, ‘The Cracked Crucible: Judaism and mental health’, ed. Dinesh Bhugra, *Psychiatry and Religion: Context, Consensus and Controversies*, 67. Cooper also points out that “the storyteller chooses a word for Saul’s ‘raving’ which is the same word used in different biblical contexts for ‘prophesying.’” (ibid., 66)

⁸⁸⁵ ‘The Holy Seer of Lublin’, *Four Hasidic Masters and Their Struggle against Melancholy*, 89

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 72

⁸⁸⁷ *Melancholy and Society*, 170

⁸⁸⁸ BA, 128

soon found himself writing his own response: *The Book On Adler*.⁸⁸⁹ But Kierkegaard withheld this manuscript, consigned amongst his papers only to be published after his death. In these retained pages he describes Adler as “a soul whirled about, flung aloft as a warning of dread, like the terrified bird which with anxious beating of its wings rushes out ahead of the storm which is about to follow, though as yet one hears only the hissing of it; and his thoughts are like the confused flocks of birds which flee helter-skelter before the storm.”⁸⁹⁰

Is there something in these words which holds the clue to Kierkegaard’s reluctance to publish? The possibility that Adler was insane, or “a deranged genius”, had occurred to Kierkegaard, and his sensitivity to any potential ordeal of public ridicule would certainly warrant his reticence. But then why write the book at all? The fact is that, as George Steiner describes, Adler had called on Kierkegaard as some kind of forerunner – to play John the Baptist to Adler’s role of emissary of God. But more than that, Steiner claims, “Adler’s conviction that mundane, rationalistic, officious Christianity in Denmark must be electrified into authentic crisis, was exactly Kierkegaard’s. The *Magister*’s readiness to suffer ridicule and ostracism on behalf of his ‘absurd’, existentially enforced certitudes, must have struck a deep, unsettling chord in S.K. himself.”⁸⁹¹ Indeed, the anxiety of Adler as “a soul whirled about, flung aloft as a warning of dread” like a bird rushing out to herald a storm is similar to a description Kierkegaard ascribed to himself: “There is a bird called the storm-petrel [*Regnspaaer* – Hong and Hong translate “rain-warner” (JP 5:5842)], and that is what I am, when in a generation storms begin to gather, individuals of my type appear.”⁸⁹²

In his failure to bring the enigma of Adler into clear focus, Steiner suggests that Kierkegaard betrays his own anxieties to be the inherent focus of *The [so-called] Book On Adler*. In the stormy and vertiginous buffeting of Adler’s soul dare one read Kierkegaard, the storm-petrel, trembling before the very storm he has come to announce? Is he, beneath the façade of a *flâneur*, a wild and frightened wandering voice of the wilderness – wandering in and out of cafés and theatres! – trembling before his own call to return to God? It is interesting to note Steiner’s appropriate discernment that “the image burning between the lines is that of Jacob wrestling with the Stranger.”⁸⁹³ For all his sacrifices and apostolic dread perhaps it is Kierkegaard who is struggling, to the point of madness or annihilation, to authenticate a calling – to derive the benediction of a naming from a divine stranger; to realise his own name “divinely understood.”⁸⁹⁴

Anfægtelse and the Anxiety of the Sublime

All those who have served the unconditioned have first received a blow that seemed to crush them, yet without slaying them... So it was with Paul when he was thrown to the ground, so also with Luther when the lightning struck and killed his friend, so also with Pascal when the horse ran away with him.

⁸⁸⁹ See George Steiner’s ‘Introduction’, to *Fear and Trembling* and *The Book On Adler*, xviii (also reproduced as ‘The Wound of Negativity’ in ed. Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain, *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*.

⁸⁹⁰ BA, 169

⁸⁹¹ BA, ‘Introduction’, xix

⁸⁹² *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Alexander Dru (542) / Pap. VI A 119

⁸⁹³ BA, ‘Introduction’, xx

⁸⁹⁴ SUD, 34

This blow is like a sunstroke directly on the brain. It is the infinite concentrated intensively in one single blow and one single moment...

Moreover no man can bring himself this close to the unconditioned, he cannot do it, and no man dares venture it since this blow, this sunstroke, is like the deadliest danger, something every man must shrink from as more horrible than death...⁸⁹⁵

One might well imagine how Jacob himself carries away from the benediction of his struggle an enduring wound – the shrunken sinew of his thigh (Genesis 32:32): his own reminder of a ‘thorn in the flesh’. “As with Jacob and Paul, everyone who enters fully upon this relationship of Christian faith within the sphere of the paradoxical religiousness of Christianity must bear to some extent the marks of suffering, the *stigmata* of Christ”, Martin writes, “Christian faith at its highest point involves *Anfechtung*, the trial of faith, the temptation from above.”⁸⁹⁶ Indeed Kierkegaard constantly alludes to his own ‘thorn in the flesh’: “my limitation and my cross”⁸⁹⁷ – an evocation Theodor Hacker discerns as ultimately relating to his comprehension of God’s unconditioned will for his life.⁸⁹⁸ In contemplating the changelessness of God, the terrifying thought implied for Kierkegaard is that “with this immutable will you must nevertheless some time, sooner or later, come into collision... this immutable will, which cannot but crush you if you come into hostile collision with it.”⁸⁹⁹ Enmity is manifest in the inability to reconcile the human will and the Divine will without the much resisted submission of the former to the latter. Kierkegaard confesses his own acute anxiety over his relation to an apparently indeterminable, and yet unconditionally determined, divine destiny:

From the very beginning I have been as it were under arrest and every instant have sensed the fact that it was not I that played the part of the master, but that another was Master... The dialectical factor in this is that whatever extraordinary gift may have been entrusted to me, it was entrusted as a precautionary measure with such elasticity that; if I were not to obey, it would strike me dead... Without God I am too strong for myself, and perhaps in the most agonising of all ways am broken.⁹⁰⁰

As for Adler, “He truly is shaken, he is in mortal danger, he lies (to employ an expression used by another author) over 70,000 fathoms of water”.⁹⁰¹ Adler’s “deranged genius”, his anxiety which Steiner suggests resounds in Kierkegaard, is characterised in terms of “dizziness”.⁹⁰² He has looked down into the abyss of 70,000 fathoms and felt its vertigo. “Anxiety may be compared with dizziness”, as Vigilius Haufniensis concurs, “He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy.”⁹⁰³ Or as Kierkegaard describes in *The Book On Adler*, “one becomes dizzy on looking down from a tower, for the glance plunging down finds no limit, no bound... The dizzy is the wide, the endless, the unlimited, the boundless; and dizziness itself is the boundlessness of the senses.”⁹⁰⁴ As such, dizziness is the anxious reaction to gazing into the amorphous void. Or, dare we invoke the analogy, the sublime

⁸⁹⁵ JP 4:4903 / Pap. X5 A 17

⁸⁹⁶ *The Wings of Faith*, 101

⁸⁹⁷ JP 5:5913 / Pap VII A 126

⁸⁹⁸ See Kierkegaard *The Cripple*, 43-44

⁸⁹⁹ ‘The Unchangeableness of God’, *For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourselves! and Three Discourses*, 232

⁹⁰⁰ PV, 69-70

⁹⁰¹ BA, 246

⁹⁰² BA, 220

⁹⁰³ CA, 61

⁹⁰⁴ BA, 221

abyss:⁹⁰⁵ that which overwhelms and disturbs the senses which attempt to perceive it. The act of vision which causes the eye to tremble is that feeling of the sublime “found in a formless object”, as Kant describes, aroused by “*boundlessness*”.⁹⁰⁶

One might say that Adler’s God-relationship, inebriated as it is by the delusion of direct revelation, has become vertiginous. The remedy for such vertigo is to seek deliverance from the infinite by attaching to the finite: “one may stop it by catching upon something with the eye... So also must he who, spiritually understood, suffers from dizziness try to limit himself.”⁹⁰⁷ Limitation is the countermeasure for such intoxication by the infinite in which, spiritually understood, one “has so wandered astray in the infinite that nothing finite can acquire for him substantial existence, that he can get no standard of measurement. This kind of dizziness consists rather in an excess of imagination”.⁹⁰⁸ And so it is that the dizziness of the ‘imagination’ that Adler suffers from is close to what Anti-Climacus might describe as the sort of dangerous and unsustainable “infinetizing” discussed in the previous chapter. “The God-relationship is an infinitizing. But in fantasy this infinitizing can so sweep a man off his feet that his state is simply an intoxication.”⁹⁰⁹ Or, as Kierkegaard warns in *The Book On Adler*, “If fantasy is allowed to run wild, then from this comes about the pagan doctrine of luck and fate, or the *unchristian* doctrine of election by grace, conceived in the despairing sense.”⁹¹⁰ In other words, it is the anxiety of predestination in which “it is unhappy to be shut out, rejected; and it is unhappy to be saved in that way.”⁹¹¹ In such fantasy the anxious thought of being astray over the abyss of election or damnation becomes a dreadful intoxication. Kierkegaard aptly describes how the disposition of a fearful anxiety, in Milbank’s words, “mutates into the state of sin: the imagining God to be terrible”.⁹¹²

Does such ‘imagination’ – which Paul Ricoeur calls “the crucible of every process of infinitization”⁹¹³ – suggest the realm of the sublime: the gaze into the abyss which overwhelms the eye? The sublime’s relation to imagination is apparent in a sublime anxiety, the fear of annihilation by the abyss, or by God: what Lynn Poland suitably calls “the imagination’s fantasy of injury”.⁹¹⁴ Before the scene of the sublime – an overwhelming vision which transports one beyond oneself – there is an

⁹⁰⁵ See John Milbank, ‘The Sublime in Kierkegaard’, ed. Philip Blond, *Post-Secular Theology*. Milbank explores the link, itself pre-Kierkegaardian, “between the psychology of anxiety and the aesthetics of sublimity. The mediating term between the two is ‘suspense’. The sublime sensation arises before an abyss, a gulf, an ultimate edge, an interval without apparent end; before this suspension we must remain, temporarily, ‘in suspense’, and so (ontologically) ‘anxious’.” 153 n.38

⁹⁰⁶ Kant, ‘Analytic of the Sublime’, *Critique of Judgement*, 82. George Pattison also notes “the strong conceptual analogies between Kantian sublimity and Kierkegaardian anxiety.” ‘Sublimity and the Experience of Freedom in Kierkegaard’, ed. James Giles, *Kierkegaard and Freedom*, 189. While acknowledging that Kierkegaard does not derive a concept of ‘the sublime’ (whether referring to *det Sublime* or *Ophøietheden*), Pattison also considers “Kierkegaardian sublimity” under what he calls “the anxious sublime” in ‘Kierkegaard and the Sublime’, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1998*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser, 245-275

⁹⁰⁷ BA, 221. See also CA, 61.

⁹⁰⁸ BA, 221-222

⁹⁰⁹ SUD, 32

⁹¹⁰ BA, 223

⁹¹¹ BA, 223

⁹¹² ‘The Sublime in Kierkegaard’, 142

⁹¹³ ‘Kierkegaard and Evil’, ed. Harold Bloom, *Modern Critical Views: Søren Kierkegaard*, 56

interplay of vertigo and narrowness. The intoxication of the sublime, overwhelming in its almost vertiginous expanse, becomes anxiously [from Latin *angere*, to press tightly] oppressive. As Poland describes, “sublime transport turns on an encounter with some ‘opposition,’ or ‘difficulty’; one must first experience the limits of one’s capacities, must first feel frozen in terror or astonishment, before the positive moment and movement of transport can occur.”⁹¹⁵ Can this be equated with the opposition of *Anfechtung*: the limit of the absolute enforcing itself upon the individual? Hence the felt “fantasy of injury, an imagined terror”.⁹¹⁶

But this felt terror-threat of “imagining God to be terrible” is imagined but never actualised. Therefore Kant, in his treatment of the sublime, “insists on the imagination’s position of security because he wants us to see that sublimity is not in the external object, but in our relation to it.”⁹¹⁷ Or adapting Vigilius Haufniensis’s terms, the dizziness of anxiety “is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down.”⁹¹⁸ But *The Concept of Anxiety* does not deal with any tangible confrontation with the sublime. The abyss is a metaphor, an imaginative visualisation, for anxiety. Despite eliciting anxiety, the metaphorical abyss which confronts the soul is not the abyss which confronts us in the starry vault of heaven or the expanse of the ocean. In order to view such sights as sublime, Kant suggests that we suspend our scientific inquisition in deference to a purely aesthetic judgement. Hence one must not look up to the cosmos with the cartographic eye of astrology; but “must regard it, just as we see it, as a distant, all-embracing vault.”⁹¹⁹ Likewise for the ocean to come into sublime focus one must not think of it in the technical terms of the oceanographer, but rather one must “regard it as poets do, merely by what strikes the eye – if it is at rest, as a clear mirror of water only bounded by the heaven; if it is restless, as an abyss threatening to overwhelm everything.”⁹²⁰ Insofar, then, as the sublime resides in the eye of the poet might one say that it resides essentially in that Kierkegaardian sphere of the aesthetic?⁹²¹ In the religious sphere would it be more appropriate to speak of the *numinous*?

And yet, Otto wonders, might there not exist “a hidden kinship between the numinous and the sublime which is something more than mere analogy, and to which Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* bears distant witness.”⁹²² Perhaps we have here an overlapping of the aesthetic and the religious spheres? After all, Otto testifies to a sense of “dizzy intoxication” to the almost Dionysiac fascination and

⁹¹⁴ Lynn Poland, ‘The Idea of the Holy and the History of the Sublime’, *Journal of Religion* 72 (1992), 181

⁹¹⁵ Ibid., 178

⁹¹⁶ Ibid., 180

⁹¹⁷ Ibid., 180

⁹¹⁸ CA, 61

⁹¹⁹ *Critique of Judgement*, 110

⁹²⁰ *Critique of Judgement*, 111

⁹²¹ George Pattison also wishes “to speak of ‘the anxious sublime’, in an attempt to locate an impulse towards the religious within the aesthetic that is none the less appropriately experienced and interpreted as aesthetic.” ‘Kierkegaard and the Sublime’, 248. Kierkegaard, moreover, describes modern understanding of the sublime as an “aesthetic accountancy” for transcendence. “[W]e are unable to form properly for ourselves an idea of God’s sublimity. We always bog down in our aesthetic quantifying – the amazing, the tremendous, the very influential etc.” JP 1:981 / Pap. X² A 178

⁹²² *The Idea of the Holy*, 65. Just as for Otto the Sphinx at Gizeh set the sublime “throbbing in the soul almost like a mechanical reflex” (68), so Kant also recounts how the pyramids of Egypt arouse the

transport of the numen.⁹²³ The numinous, Otto tells us, exhibits the dual elements of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* and “the sublime exhibits the same peculiar dual character as the numinous; it is at once daunting, and yet again singularly attracting, in its impress upon the mind.”⁹²⁴ Ultimately, “‘the sublime’, like ‘the numinous’, is in Kantian language an idea or concept ‘that cannot be unfolded’ or explicated (*unauswickelbar*).”⁹²⁵

Surely the most revealing analogy resides in Kant’s allusion to the sublimity of God. The sublime in nature, Kant maintains, initially resides in the excitation of fear. And yet one can regard something as fearful and still not be afraid of it. “Thus the virtuous man fears God without being afraid of him”.⁹²⁶ In this sense, the fear of God is appreciated without one being overwhelmed by all its horror. Whoever flees from the object in nature which incites such dread is incapable of forming a judgement about the sublime since “it is impossible to find satisfaction in a terror that is seriously felt.”⁹²⁷ Hence the joy of the sublime resides in the deliverance from the threat of extinction. The terror of annihilation and our comparative defencelessness elicited by the intimidation of vast overhanging rocks; brooding thunder clouds; raging volcanoes; turbulent hurricanes; ungovernable oceans; towering waterfalls all convey a sight “more attractive, the more fearful it is, provided only that we are in security”.⁹²⁸ And so it is that the sublime arouses in us a certain nobility by which our mind, through the judgement of reason, triumphs over nature: “we willingly call these objects sublime, because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height and discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind, which gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature.”⁹²⁹

And yet, Kant concedes, this self-estimation of the sublimity of our own nature is in apparent conflict with the “subjection, abasement, and a feeling of complete powerlessness” that is an appropriate response to the representation of God “in His wrath and yet in His sublimity, in the tempest, the storm, the earthquake, etc.”⁹³⁰ In fact, “it would be foolish and criminal to imagine a superiority of our minds over these works of His”.⁹³¹ However, Kant expresses some reticence about such ‘dust and ashes’ self-abasement in which he suspects a superstition for implicit favour-seeking

sense of the sublime. See *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, 49 and *Critique of Judgement*, 90.

⁹²³ *The Idea of the Holy*, 30

⁹²⁴ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 43. Such ambivalence is apparent in anxiety which, as Haufniensis explains, is a desire for what one fears; its relation is also “sympathetic and antipathetic”. CA, 103. And this is most potently manifest in the dread and fascination of guilt: “life offers sufficient phenomena in which the individual in anxiety gazes almost desirously at guilt and yet fears it. Guilt has for the eye of the spirit the fascinating power of the serpent’s glance.” CA, 103. Vincent McCarthy also notes the resemblance between this ambiguous language of an anxiety which may lead towards God and Otto’s *tremendum et fascinans*, suggesting that “one may not be going too far in linking the sympathy-antipathy to a vague intuition of the holy, religious dimension of the potential self.” *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*, 49n.32

⁹²⁵ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 42. However, while it may be understandable to explain God’s ‘transcendence’ analogously by God’s ‘sublimity’, Otto warns that this should not be taken *literally*. Religious feelings are ultimately unidentifiable with aesthetic feelings, even ‘the sublime’. 42 n.1

⁹²⁶ *Critique of Judgement*, 100

⁹²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 100-101

⁹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 103

and vulgar flattery. As such, the bowing and scraping of much “prostration, adoration with bent head, with contrite, anxious demeanor and voice... is far from being necessarily bound up with the idea of the *sublimity* of a religion and its object.”⁹³² Fear of the LORD is not necessarily the beginning of wisdom since such fear and trembling before the irresistible will and might of God does not properly place one “in the frame of mind for admiring the divine greatness. For this a mood of calm contemplation and a quite free judgement are needed.”⁹³³ Hence the Kantian insistence on the sublimity of our own nature resurfaces, albeit in the guise of moral humility:

Only if he is conscious of an upright disposition pleasing to God do those operations of might serve to awaken in him the idea of the sublimity of this Being, for then he recognizes in himself a sublimity of disposition conformable to His will; and thus he is raised above the fear of such operations of nature, which he no longer regards as outbursts of His wrath. Even humility, in the shape of a stern judgment upon his own faults... is a sublime state of mind, consisting in a voluntary subjection of himself to the pain of remorse, in order that the causes of this may be removed.⁹³⁴

Moral humility, in other words, frees Kant from the fear and trembling of subjection in order to attain a sublime mind-set suitable for contemplating the sublimity of the divine.⁹³⁵ Reading Otto, on the other hand, there is less of an impression of serene austerity in contemplating the sublimity of God and more emphasis upon an untranslatable infinite qualitative difference – an impassable abyss. Fear of the LORD is indeed the beginning of such wisdom.

Starting from Kant’s distinction between the sublime and the beautiful, Hegel proceeds to name the *negative* relation of sublimity expressed in the sacred art of Hebrew poetry – expressing the nullity, dependence, subsistence of the world in contrast to the mighty sovereignty of the creator God. Over against the divine dominion, the creature can only convey its own unworthiness and transience: “Therefore, further, man views himself in his *unworthiness* before God; his exaltation consist in fear of the Lord, in trembling before his wrath, and we find depicted in a penetrating and affecting way grief over nullity, and the cry of the soul to God in complaint, suffering, and lament from the depths of the heart.”⁹³⁶ While Hegel perceives in the Psalms such “classic examples of genuine sublimity set forth for all time”,⁹³⁷ Otto discerns the analogy between ‘the holy’ and ‘the sublime’ described “in an unsurpassable form in the sixth chapter of Isaiah, where there is sublimity alike in the lofty throne and the sovereign figure of God, the skirts of His raiment ‘filling the temple’ and the solemn majesty of the attendant angels about Him.”⁹³⁸ But lingering in contemplation where Otto passes swiftly on, one may discern that there is something about this theophany in the temple that decisively departs from the Kantian sublime. Isaiah’s apprehension of something more than the sublime, something numinous, is

⁹³¹ *Ibid.*

⁹³² *Ibid.*

⁹³³ *Ibid.*

⁹³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹³⁵ Effectively, Kant’s moral sublime constituted “the interiorization of absolute immensity” by which, as Sylviane Agacinski argues, “the fear was exorcized: the absolute was no longer external.” ‘We Are Not Sublime: Love and Sacrifice, Abraham and Ourselves’, ed. Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain, *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, 136

⁹³⁶ Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures On fine Art Volume I*, 376

⁹³⁷ *Aesthetics*, 375

⁹³⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 65

apparent in his spontaneous response to the vision of God upon a throne. Isaiah does not join his voice to the chorus of exaltation: 'Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts' (v.3). Instead of ecstatic or sublime transport, Isaiah responds with the spontaneous despair of unworthiness. 'Woe is me for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips... for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts' (Isaiah 6:5).⁹³⁹ Hence one may read the disproportion Isaiah feels as manifest between the so-called sublimity of the sovereign figure of God and the conviction that he Isaiah, a sinner of infinite difference from God, gazes upon this vision. It is this insistence upon disproportion, and not upon the sublimity of human disposition contemplating the divine sublimity, that attests to Isaiah 6 as a distinctly *numinous* theophany: one might say an unsurpassable description of *Anfechtung*.

The numinous in Otto's schema is 'Wholly Other': the untranslatable *mysterium*. Furthermore, the sublime as Kant maintains is as much in the imagination as dizziness, for Haufniensis, is in the eye. Sublimity, for Kant, resides in our mind and it is from here that contemplation of the divine takes its reference point.

Only by supposing this idea in ourselves and in reference to it are we capable of attaining to the idea of the sublimity of that Being which produces respect in us, not merely by the might that it displays in nature, but rather by means of the faculty which resides in us of judging it fearlessly and of regarding our destination as sublime in respect of it.⁹⁴⁰

Yet the numinous, as discussed, originates in something ultimately "objective and outside the self".⁹⁴¹ It is this collision between self and Wholly Other that elicits a numinous dread in which the perceived threat of annihilation must have some basis in an external reality which is more than the internal "fantasy of injury". The prophet expresses for Otto "that feeling that man in his 'profaneness' is not *worthy* to stand in the presence of the holy one, and that his own entire personal unworthiness might defile even holiness itself."⁹⁴² Isaiah articulates something more than a loss of identity, and that is not simply the unreality of the self, but a personal conviction of oneself as unworthy. The self is ultimately not lost or annihilated, but becomes conscious of itself in its recoiling despair before the holiness which makes the threat of extinction very apparent indeed: the *Anfechtung* of the infinite qualitative difference. This *Anfechtung* comes into clearer focus when differentiated from the imagined oppression of the sublime and the dread of the immensity of existence.

⁹³⁹ H. V. Martin is reminded of this grieving of Isaiah by the lament in *The Sickness unto Death*, 32: "That a sparrow can live before God is comprehensible; it does not know that it exists before God. But to know that one exists before God, and then not instantly go mad or sink into nothingness!" However, in taking this to symbolise the sense of "transcendent holiness" which "overwhelms man to the extreme of inward suffering", Martin has overlooked the delusion of the infinitising imagination which Anti-Climacus warns against in this "fantasized religious person" (*The Wings of Faith*, 97-98). Nevertheless, despite suggesting this apparent rapport between Otto's exemplary Isaiah 6:5 and Kierkegaard's sense of the "inward suffering... caused by the indirect relationship of faith to God", Martin is adamant that "Kierkegaard's conception of this suffering should not be confused with Otto's notion of religious awe, with its fascinating terror, in the presence of the Numinous. Christian suffering is existential suffering, the suffering of the soul that longs for some more direct relationship to God, some surer footing than faith." *The Wings of Faith*, 98

⁹⁴⁰ *Critique of Judgement*, 104

⁹⁴¹ *The Idea of the Holy*, 11

On May 12th 1839 Kierkegaard confessed that:

All existence [*Tilværelsen*] makes me anxious, from the smallest fly to the mysteries of the Incarnation; the whole thing is inexplicable to me, I myself most of all; to me all existence is infected, I myself most of all. My distress is enormous, boundless; no one knows it except God in heaven, and he will not console me; no one can console me except God in heaven and he will not take compassion on me. – Young man, if you have gone astray, turn back to God, and from his upbringing you will take along with you a youthfulness strengthened for manly tasks.⁹⁴³

Kierkegaard's words are inevitably reminiscent of a Pascalian anxiety. Pascal speaks specifically of a dread of the infinite rooted in "man's loneliness in the macrocosm"⁹⁴⁴ – the felt nothingness of man before a universe capable of crushing him. In this sense, his oppression sometimes sounds like a kind of cosmological *Anfechtung* in the grasp of an onerous infinity. In contemplating the boundlessness of a fathomless universe he speaks of the immensity of space that infinitely transcends the imagination. Indeed, "it is the greatest perceptible mark of God's omnipotence that our imagination should lose itself in that thought."⁹⁴⁵ And yet, from turning man towards the immensity of the universe, Pascal declares that "I want to show him a new abyss."⁹⁴⁶ And so Pascal redirects contemplation from the infinite to the infinitesimal: to "all the conceivable immensity of nature in this miniature atom."⁹⁴⁷ Unlike Kant's deliberately superficial 'eye of the poet' which discerns the sublime, Pascal's meditation is consciously cosmological and scientific. And it is from this minute atomic perspective that the human body itself derives a newly discovered colossal sublimity. "Anyone who considers himself in this way will be terrified at himself, and, seeing his mass, as given him by nature, supporting him between two abysses of infinity and nothingness, will tremble at these marvels."⁹⁴⁸

Pascal's anxiety is the anxiety of a human being suspended "between two abysses of infinity and nothingness": two forces which transcend the dual extremes of human understanding and which cause him to dread. Pascal's experience of cosmological *tremendum* – whereby "The eternal silence of these infinite spaces fill me with dread"⁹⁴⁹ – is reciprocated by an anthropological horror. From this perspective, the human being has become a de-familiarised *Tremendum*; perhaps closer to what Otto discusses as "the uncanny" [*das Unheimliche*] or "the monstrous" [*das Ungeheuer*] – as in Sophocles's daunting observation, "Much there that is monstrous [*ungeheuer*]; but nought is more monstrous [*ungeheuer*] than man."⁹⁵⁰ The sublime anxiety is thereby internalised; in Pattison's words, "it is the inconceivability of my own existence that assails me from within the very heart of that existence itself."⁹⁵¹

⁹⁴² *The Idea of the Holy*, 56

⁹⁴³ JP 5:5383 / Pap. II A 420

⁹⁴⁴ Harper, *The Seventh Solitude*, 27

⁹⁴⁵ *Pensées* 199 (72), p.89

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 90

⁹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.95

⁹⁵⁰ *The Idea of the Holy*, 40. The resemblance between the monstrous and the sublime is apparent in Otto's observation that Goethe employs *ungeheuer* to denote "what is too vast for our faculty of space-perception, such as the immeasurable vault of the night sky." *The Idea of the Holy*, 41

⁹⁵¹ 'Sublimity and the Experience of Freedom in Kierkegaard', 195

But *Anfechtung*, spiritually understood, is more than the mere dread of oneself or the dread of an impersonal but greater force weighing upon oneself. There is a difference between an *Anfechtung* (if this is not a miss-application of the word) in which one feels the weight of something greater in the aesthetic or cosmological sense, and the *Anfechtung* of the God-relationship. The struggle against the cosmos, against the sublime, against existence itself, is not the same struggle as the loving struggle with God. Hence Pascal testifies to a recognition of something within him which rationally transcends that which would extinguish him when he declares that “even if the universe were to crush him, man would still be nobler than his slayer, because he knows that he is dying and the advantage the universe has over him. The universe knows nothing of this.”⁹⁵² And yet the loving struggle of *Anfechtung* is marked by a more terrible anxiety, as Isaiah 6 attests to: the anxiety of sin which threatens one’s spiritual as well as physical existence.

Holy Hypochondria

[A] person becomes momentarily anxious and afraid of ideality and himself – and of God, who seems to be so infinitely sublime that one does not dare think of him at all. It seems as if he must become disgusted and tired of listening to one’s nonsense and nauseated with one’s sins.⁹⁵³

“To be sure,” Kierkegaard observes, “the blow of the unconditioned also takes the form of sin-consciousness; there is a concentration of sin or past sins in one single blow, in one single moment, and this falls on a man’s conscience.”⁹⁵⁴ When this personal consciousness of sin is lacking in an individual, then, according to Anti-Climacus, “Christianity, terrifying, will rise up against him and transform itself into madness or horror until he either learns to give up Christianity or – ... by means of the anguish of a contrite conscience, all in proportion to *his* need – learns to enter into Christianity by the narrow way, through the consciousness of sin.”⁹⁵⁵ This narrow [*trang*] way is also the way of anxiety [*Angst* – deriving from the Latin *angustiae* – ‘narrows’].⁹⁵⁶ Yet, in such anxiety, repentance is in danger of falling into an irremediable grief. “Repentance has lost its mind,” as Vigilius Haufniensis describes, “and anxiety is potentiated into repentance.”⁹⁵⁷ Repentance despairs as anxiety condemns itself: “its condemnation is certain, and the augmented judgment is that the individual shall be dragged

⁹⁵² *Pensées* XV 200, p.95. Hence Pattison writes, “When I judge a storm to be sublime, I am able to do so because I recognize, with Pascal, that even if it should destroy me physically, there is that in me which is of another order than mere physical force and which enables me to confront even actual danger as ‘marvellous! Sublime!’” ‘Kierkegaard and the Sublime’, 253

⁹⁵³ JP 2:2008 / Pap. IX A 316

⁹⁵⁴ JP 4:4903/ Pap. X5 A 17

⁹⁵⁵ PIC, 68

⁹⁵⁶ As Tillich observes in *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, 39. Likewise Bonhoeffer notes the common root between *Angst*, *Enge* (‘narrowness’) and *bange* (‘woeful’). (*Act and Being*, 168 translator’s note) Similarly in Danish *Angst* associates with *trang* (‘narrow’) and *trængsel* (‘narrowness’, ‘tribulation’, also suggesting ‘crowd’). See ‘Not That the Way is Narrow [*trang*], But That Narrowness [*trængsel*] is the Way’, *Gospel of Sufferings*, 97. “That we find the way narrow [*trang*], that tribulation [*trængsel*] then is an encountering of opposition, it is an obstacle on the way; there is something to win through, but then the way does lead to bliss.” (*Ibid.*, 107) 1 Thess 3:3 ‘We are appointed to tribulations [*trængsler*].’ However, as noted, *Angst* in the Kierkegaardian corpus also has a strongly vertiginous connotation.

⁹⁵⁷ CA, 115

through life to the place of execution. In other words, repentance has gone crazy.”⁹⁵⁸ Bizarrely, however, this madness is also “the sign of a deeper nature.”⁹⁵⁹ This is the kind of “spiritual trial” [*Anfægtelse*] which has, lamentably, been disregarded by the spiritlessness of the modern age:

In the old days, the road to perfection was narrow [*trang*] and solitary. The journey along it was always disturbed by aberrations, exposed to predatory attacks by sin, and pursued by the arrow of the past, which is as dangerous as that of the Scythian hordes.⁹⁶⁰

As such, this madness is a kind of “holy hypochondria [*heilige Hypochondrie*]”⁹⁶¹ which, though it may fail in its scrupulous anxiety to diagnose the proportion of its guilt, at least recognises the perilous danger of the road to perfection. Yet the self-diagnosis of specious anxiety over sin threatens the individual with something like melancholy’s capitulation into nihilism: that is “anxiety’s moment of death.”⁹⁶² As such, Vigilius Haufniensis prescribes, “The only thing that is truly able to disarm the sophistry of sin is faith, courage to believe that the state itself is a new sin, courage to renounce anxiety without anxiety, which only faith can do”.⁹⁶³

Such anxiety can engender the appearance of innumerable spiritual trials. Consequently Kierkegaard warns that one must be extremely careful in what is said to someone as vulnerable as a child lest a casual remark “occasion an anguished conscience in which innocent and fragile souls can easily be tempted to believe themselves guilty”.⁹⁶⁴ Children, in Vigilius Haufniensis’s assessment, are inherently more adventurously disposed towards anxiety⁹⁶⁵ and hence more susceptible to any anxiety which plays upon the imagination. In childish anxiety is found “the dreaming of the spirit”,⁹⁶⁶ but in such impressionable and vulnerable minds this dream may easily be transmuted into a nightmare. And yet it is surely not only childhood which, in the fragility of the conscience, is susceptible to that “flame of hell which ignites the tinder which is in every soul”.⁹⁶⁷ Such an anxiety over God-forsakenness resides latently in each individual soul:

Deep within every human being there still lives the anxiety over the possibility of being alone in the world, forgotten by God, overlooked among the millions and millions in this enormous household.⁹⁶⁸

It is tempting to discern a fetish for anxiety in Kierkegaard; to observe in Kierkegaard’s melancholy a genealogy of morbid religious guilt rendered extravagant by his strict religious upbringing.⁹⁶⁹ Yet

⁹⁵⁸ CA, 116

⁹⁵⁹ CA, 116

⁹⁶⁰ CA, 117

⁹⁶¹ CA, 162*. Vigilius Haufniensis quotes this phrase from J. G. Hamman, *Skriften* (Berlin: 1821-43) Vol. VI, p.194.

⁹⁶² CA, 117

⁹⁶³ CA, 117

⁹⁶⁴ JP 1:91 / Pap. II A

⁹⁶⁵ CA, 42

⁹⁶⁶ CA, 42

⁹⁶⁷ JP 1:91 / Pap. II A

⁹⁶⁸ JP 1:100 / Pap. VIII¹ A 363. As John of the Cross likewise describes this sense of desolation: “the greatest affliction of the sorrowful soul in this state is the thought that God has abandoned it, of which it has no doubt; that He has cast it away into the darkness as an abominable thing.” *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Book II, chapter vi, 89

⁹⁶⁹ H.V. Martin makes such an observation in *Kierkegaard: The Melancholy Dane*, 16

Kierkegaard was also emphatic that self-indictment could betray a melancholy in which “the heart can abase itself, and yet never enough to satisfy it”.⁹⁷⁰ He ascribed to the spirit of 1 John 3:10 ‘Though our heart condemn us, God is greater than our hearts’: the assurance that although fear and trembling was an appropriate response to holiness, pathological or melancholy self-conviction is not decisive. Despite his own gloomy spiritual preoccupations, Kierkegaard stood in a prolific tradition of ‘physicians of the soul’ who attempted to alleviate such errors of self-mortification. As he counsels:

[W]hether it was a sickness of the soul which every night so darkened thy mind that at last with deathly anguish, *brought near to madness by the apprehension of God's holiness*, thou didst feel that thou must condemn thyself, whatever the dreadful thing was which weighed upon thy conscience that thy heart condemned thee – God is greater!⁹⁷¹

There is a prolific tradition of evidence exploring how such convictions induce or originate in melancholy and may well descend into madness.⁹⁷² It has at times been believed that one's own self-indictment may conceal the real possibility of supernatural manipulation. The devil, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* suggests, can exploit the melancholic conscience:

The devil that then told thee it was a light sin, or no sin at all, now aggravates on the other side, and telleth thee that it is a most irremissible offence, as he did by Cain and Judas, to bring them to despair.⁹⁷³

Tormented by his offence, Cain despairs that ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear’ (Genesis 4:13), and devours himself in sorrow over his transgression. Such melancholic minds are transfixed by their brooding sins to the extent that, as Burton writes, “they account themselves Reprobates, quite forsaken of God, already damned, past all hope of grace, incapable of mercy, slaves of sin, and their offences so great, they cannot be forgiven.”⁹⁷⁴ Such a self-interpretation is preserved in *A Narrative of*

⁹⁷⁰ ‘Discourses at the Communion on Fridays’, CD, 300

⁹⁷¹ CD, 301[My emphasis]

⁹⁷² Such belief in one's own damnation risks becoming pathologically delusional once its conviction becomes unwavering. Foucault suggests that “too much moral rigor, too much anxiety about salvation and the life to come were often thought to bring on melancholia.” (*Madness and Civilization*, 204) It therefore seems intuitive to suggest that ‘sin’ is a crucial factor in causes of mental illness. However, in balance it is interesting to note Maurice Lipsedge's summary of Kroll and Bacrach's study of madness in the middle ages [Kroll, J. and Bachrach, B., ‘Sin and mental illness in the Middle Ages’, *Psychological Medicine* 14 (1984), 507-14.]. Sin itself was rarely regarded as causing madness (without a supernatural element):

Sin was most commonly implicated as the cause of madness or epilepsy which were combined with possession, while possession alone was attributed to sin in only a single case. The commonest combination was madness/possession/sin. Madness without possession was rarely attributed to sin. (‘Religion and Madness in History’, ed. Dinesh

Bhugra, *Psychiatry and Religion: Context, Consensus and Controversies*, 33)

⁹⁷³ *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Pt. 3, Section 4, Member 2, Subsection 3, 401

⁹⁷⁴ *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Pt. 3, Section 4, Member I, Subsection 6, 410. For example, Thielman draws particular attention to the testimony of the depressive William Cowper's (1731-1800) pre-occupation with negative ideas. Cowper confesses, “I saw plainly that God alone could deliver me, but was firmly persuaded that he would not and therefore omitted to ask it.” ‘Adelphi: An Account of the Conversion of W.C. Esquire’. Quoted in Samuel B. Thielman, ‘Reflections on the role of Religion in the History of Society’ (ed. Harold G. Koenig, *Handbook of Religion and Mental Health*). The dreadful anxiety over one's salvation persists in the uncertainty of a dangerously abstract self-regard; as such desert fathers and medieval penitents wrote with a surprisingly pragmatic emphasis about combating the temptations of *acedia* and the various ‘bad thoughts’. See Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*, e.g. Chapter 23, ‘From First Movements to the

God's Gracious Dealings with that Choice Christian Mrs. Hannah Allen (1683): a seventeenth century autobiographical pamphlet frankly recounting an Englishwoman's descent into a religiously oriented melancholia.⁹⁷⁵ "My Sins are so great, that if all the Sins of all the Devils and the Damned in Hell, and all the Reprobates on Earth were comprehended in one man; mine are greater; there is no word comes so near the comprehension of the dreadfulness of my Condition; as that, I am the Monster of the Creation".⁹⁷⁶ To such a person God becomes the avenger, as David says (*ultor a tergo Deus*), or Nemesis as the poets call it.⁹⁷⁷ For only God, in all the divinity of wrath, can deal with this reprobate who induces a dread more fearful than the *ungeheuer* of Sophocles – a self-confessed "Monster of the Creation."

In such fear of God we may detect echoes of a more primitive "daemonic dread", as Otto discerns in the account in Exodus 4:24 of Yahweh who, meeting Moses by the way, sought to kill him.⁹⁷⁸ Johannes Climacus also describes *Anfægtelse* as "the nemesis upon the strong moment in the absolute relationship."⁹⁷⁹ But the retribution of this particular nemesis possesses a slightly different emphasis. It is the opposition of the absolute against the individual: specifically against the individual's attempt to relate to something Wholly Other. It is the strenuously high price for the God-relationship asserting itself – although not such way as to imply that the God-relationship should be abandoned. It is a testing of the absolute relationship by the absolute itself. As such, it is well illustrated by the tribulation of the will undergone in Christ's agony in Gethsemane. In reference to Christ's 'sorrow unto death' before the *mysterium tremendum*, Otto appropriately relates the "strangely parallel" and "prophetically significant" accounts of "Yahweh who waylaid Moses by night, and of Jacob who

Seven Cardinal Sins: Evagrius'. The problem being that assurance often does not seem sufficiently to substantiate itself in the melancholic mind, perhaps what is required is a substantiation of punishment, 'the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul' (Micah 6:7)? Foucault suggests the benefits of the penitential method: "If a man felt guilty, he was subject to real, often material punishment which occupied his mind and gave him an assurance that the transgression was redressed." (*Madness and Civilization*, 205) Must metaphysical punishment and penance be transubstantiated into something tangible? Through the practice of penitence, pilgrimage and economic recompense the soul is able to provide tangible forms of repentance, and in return receive tangible assurance of forgiveness. Foucault suggests that "if, on the contrary, religion loosens its hold [on material penance] but maintains the ideal forms of remorse of conscience of spiritual mortification, it leads directly to madness." (*ibid.*, 205) However, physical penance can just as easily succumb to the fetishism of a melancholy form of bodily self-mortification. For example, Burton warns that, "melancholy for fear of God's judgement and hell fire, drives men to desperation... Solitariness, much fasting, divine meditations and contemplations of God's judgements, most part accompany this melancholy." (*The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Section 4, Member I, Subsection 3, 939). Both anxieties essentially dwell upon two misunderstandings of salvation. The first, by abstracted brooding over guilt, believes that the sinner's self-interpretation regarding its own damnation is definitive. The second, by mortifying itself in penance, believes it can achieve its own perdition by self-refinement. Robert Burton, writing as both physician and clergyman, stresses "these men must know, there is no sin so heinous, which is not pardonable in itself; no crime so great, but by God's mercy it may be forgiven." (*The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Section 4, Member I, Subsection 6, 951).

⁹⁷⁵ In ed. Allan Ingram, *Voices of Madness: Four Pamphlets, 1683-1796*, p.1-21

⁹⁷⁶ *Voices of Madness*, 13

⁹⁷⁷ *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Pt. 3, Sec. 4, Mem. 2, Subs. 3, 402-3. Burton even goes so far as to identify God as a cause of melancholy, "for the punishment of sin, and satisfaction of his justice, many examples and testimonies of holy Scriptures make evident unto us... He brought down their heart with heaviness. He stroke them with madness, blindness and astonishment of heart." *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 156

⁹⁷⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 74

wrestles with God”.⁹⁸⁰ Jacob struggled like Christ, “with the God of ‘Wrath’ and ‘Fury’, with the *numen*, which yet is itself ‘My Father’.”⁹⁸¹ Both ‘had power with God... and prevailed’; or as Kierkegaard might put it, ‘were victorious in that God was victorious’.

The night at Gethsemane and the night at Peni’el are united by a sense of what Otto calls “the shuddering secret of the numen.”⁹⁸² The allegory of Yisra’el suggests to us the mysterious struggle of *Anfechtung* that is as much the ‘angefochtene Christus’ just as it is “Jacob wrestling with God himself.”⁹⁸³ In its authentic form it is not an instance for daemonic dread because it is essentially a struggle of love rather than of fear. Nor is it a struggle to the death since it seeks neither annihilation of the self nor the death of God. Taken together, these two nights at Gethsemane and Peni’el remind us of a sacrifice made by God for the sake of humanity. It is Christ, as well as Jacob, who reveals what it means to struggle with God. It is with this in mind that a Kierkegaardian anatomy of *Anfægtelse* shall be considered.

⁹⁷⁹ CUP, 411.

⁹⁸⁰ *The Idea of the Holy*, 88

⁹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸² *Ibid.*

⁹⁸³ Heineken, *The Moment Before God*, 320

Chapter Five: The Anatomy of *Anfechtung*

But this is rigorous upbringing – this going from inborn anxiety to faith. Anxiety is the most terrible kind of spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*].⁹⁸⁴

Anfechtung and *Anfægtelse*

Reading Kierkegaard's works, it is difficult to escape the sense in which the God-relationship appears as "a death struggle",⁹⁸⁵ described with such perplexing evocative horror as "to be over 70,000 fathoms and yet be joyful."⁹⁸⁶ The vertiginous angst of the formless abyss is supplanted through the God-relationship by the narrowing anxiety of an inescapable conflict. As Johannes Climacus articulates, "confined within the absolute conception of God" the individual is captured like the bird imprisoned in a cage, or like the fish stranded on the shore which "lies out of its element on the dry ground – so the religious individual is confined; for absoluteness is not directly the element of a finite creature."⁹⁸⁷

Reading these harrowing descriptions of Johannes Climacus's, often ironic, pre-Christian view of a radicalised Christianity, Daphne Hampson suggests that "it is clear that Kierkegaard was speaking of circumstances he well knew."⁹⁸⁸ These illustrations of *Anfægtelse* evoke an experience Luther himself described as *Anfechtung* [*fægtel/fecht* – 'fight'].⁹⁸⁹ As Hampson explains, "*Anfechtung* (literally being fought against) is the word used within the Lutheran tradition for the sense that one is undermined/caught/pinned down when confronted by God."⁹⁹⁰ It is more oppressive than the inertia of *acedia* in which one encounters the aridity of the absence of God. Whilst *acedia* laments under the black sun of a Godless desert, *Anfechtung* is, recalling another of Kierkegaard's descriptions, a devastating and intensified sunstroke from the unconditioned. "The religious individual has lost the relativity of the immediate consciousness, its distraction, its time-wasting activity – precisely, its wastage of time; the absolute consciousness of God consumes him as the burning heat of the summer sun when it will not go down, as the burning heat of the summer sun when it will not abate."⁹⁹¹

However, *Anfechtung* is an idea that is not exclusive to the Lutheran tradition. Its roots can be traced from biblical precedence, as John of the Cross attests by invoking the Psalmist: "Thy fury is confirmed upon me; and all Thy waves Thou hast brought in upon me."⁹⁹² Such is how John describes

⁹⁸⁴ JP 2:1401 / Pap. X² A 493

⁹⁸⁵ JP 4:4725 / Pap. XI² A 67

⁹⁸⁶ SLW, 430

⁹⁸⁷ CUP, 432

⁹⁸⁸ *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought*, 256.

⁹⁸⁹ Whilst the Hong and Hong translation of "spiritual trial" alludes to the proportionate relation between *Anfægtelse* and "spirit" – a relation lost in Dru's "tribulation" – I personally prefer Swenson/Lowrie's *Anfechtung* since it implies the oppressive aspect and the more technical Lutheran theological heritage behind the word. However, as I shall examine, Kierkegaard's use of the term is not always identifiable with Luther's. As such, although both the Danish and German words centre around the common root [*fecht/fægte* – 'fight'] I am choosing to differentiate between *Anfechtung* and *Anfægtelse* to denote Luther and Kierkegaard respectively. Whilst *Anfechtung* is probably my preferred rendition I feel the need to attest to the differences as well as affinities between Luther and Kierkegaard in their use of the term. However, in quotations from the texts I have retained the relevant English translation.

⁹⁹⁰ *Christian Contradictions*, 31

⁹⁹¹ CUP, 433

⁹⁹² *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Book II, Chapter vi, 2, p. 89

the experience which is a deepening of 'aridity', the intensified feeling of 'desolation': "the state in which the soul feels not merely abandoned by God, but as if God were actively and menacingly hostile to it."⁹⁹³ Similarly Juan de los Angeles describes how the soul is initially wooed, baited, and enticed by God; "But once grabbed and caught in his net, he treats us with such rigorous severity, and in such way he deserts us, that the flesh rebels against the spirit and embarrass it into such plight that we doubt we will ever be God's friends again."⁹⁹⁴

Nevertheless, Kierkegaard's use of the term *Anfægtelse* ostensibly bears most immediate relation to Luther's *Anfechtung*.⁹⁹⁵ Kierkegaard conjures up the abyss to define the anxiety of the individual stranded tentatively between the unresolved archaeology and eschatology of one's salvation. "Ah, like the shipwrecked man who has saved himself by a plank, and thus, tossed by the waves, hovering over the abyss, between life and death, gazes fixedly at the land – so should a man be concerned for his salvation."⁹⁹⁶ Such salvific anxiety reminds one of Luther – and Kierkegaard notes, "Luther says that as soon as Christ has come on board the storm immediately begins".⁹⁹⁷ One can discern a common malady gestating in the hearts of both men. Between *Anfechtung* and *Anfægtelse* there is even a descriptive abyssal affinity: "Where Luther likens it to hanging from a cross midway between heaven and earth, Kierkegaard compares it to being suspended over a depth of 70,000 fathoms."⁹⁹⁸

While the vertiginous anxiety of the amorphous abyss is evoked, one of the most arresting impressions in the anatomy of *Anfechtung* is the sense of paralysis or captivity. "It is like the experience one has in a dream when one wants to run and yet with the utmost exertion is unable to

⁹⁹³ E. W. Trueman Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, 124 n.13. For Ignatius of Loyola, for example, in "desolation", contrasted with the joyful "consolation" of the spiritual life, the soul "finds itself altogether slothful, tepid, sad, and as it were separated from its Creator and Lord." 'Rules For the Discernment of Spirits', I, Rule IV, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, 186. Yet desolation actually encompasses and surpasses aridity: it "consists in sadness, disquiet of mind, hope in earthly things or persons, love of lower and unworthy things, aridity, depression, and wandering of the mind after things of this world, all which proceed from the evil spirit." *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, Part II The Directory, Chapter XXVII, Paragraph 4, 325.

⁹⁹⁴ *The Loving Struggle*, 134. Such descriptions, Otto identifies, point to the often subdued element of the *tremendum* in Christian mysticism: "a living factor in the *Caligo* and the *altum Silentium*, in the 'Abyss', the 'Night', the 'Deserts' of the divine nature, into which the soul must descend, in the 'agony', 'abandonment', 'barrenness', *taedium*, in which it must tarry, in the shuddering and shrinking from the loss and deprivation of self-hood and the 'annihilation' of personal identity." *The Idea of the Holy*, 109.

⁹⁹⁵ Luther is evidently not the only source of affinity for Kierkegaard's understanding of *Anfægtelse*. Louise Carroll Keeley identifies Johann Arndt's *True Christianity* (especially Book II) among the 'old devotional books' as another important source of solidarity. 'Spiritual Trial in the Thought of Kierkegaard', ed. Robert Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 313. However, Arndt does not use the term *Anfechtung* in its technical differentiation from 'temptation'. Nevertheless, *True Christianity* was undoubtedly an important book for Kierkegaard's devotional reading. See Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, 58. Vigilius Haufniensis also notes that one can find a superfluity of material on the religious spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*] in Joseph von Görres, *Die christliche Mystik*, though Haufniensis adds that "Görres does not always know how to distinguish between the demonic and the spiritual trial. Therefore the work should be used with care." CA, 143*. Kierkegaard also adds in a draft that "this work is so uncanny [*unheimlich*] that I have never dared read it carefully." Pap. V B 63.

⁹⁹⁶ 'Now We Are Nearer Our Salvation... Than When We Became Believers', CD, 227.

⁹⁹⁷ JP 4:4372 / Pap. X¹ A 22.

move a muscle – this *absolute frustration*. The difference is that one is perfectly able to move about and one can do many things, and *yet there is nothing one can do before God*.⁹⁹⁹ As the fish is stranded on the shore, and the bird is captured in the cage, or as one is shipwrecked or stranded over 70,000 fathoms; so Luther, as Tillich highlights, “compares the horrified conscience, which tries to flee and cannot escape, with a goose which pursued by the wolf, does not use its wings, as ordinarily, but its feet and is caught.”¹⁰⁰⁰ More radical than *Versuchung* (‘temptation’), Luther’s use of the word *Anfechtung* denotes “tempting attacks”¹⁰⁰¹: “the trial of faith by various temptations”.¹⁰⁰² These attacks, Tillich observes, engender a profound *Angst*, “a feeling of being enclosed in a narrow place from which there is no escape.”¹⁰⁰³ In *Angst* (deriving from the Latin *angustiae* – ‘narrows’) the world constricts to such an extreme that in Luther’s words, “There is no flight, no comfort within or without but all things accuse.”¹⁰⁰⁴

In Luther’s eyes, Creator and creation are allied in their enmity against the sinner. In this sense, the infinite difference exists between humanity and creation, not Creator and creation. “For he who is an enemy to God has the whole creation against him.”¹⁰⁰⁵ One becomes vulnerable to the innocuous mechanisms of the universe: in the changing wind, the driven leaf, Creation rises up in animated condemnation of the sinner. “At such a rustling a leaf becomes the Wrath of God, and the whole world on which a moment before we strutted in our pride, becomes too narrow for us.”¹⁰⁰⁶ Such a world harbours the risk of madness; recalling the melancholia of Hannah Allen, fearing “some horrible death”, reading condemnation in thunderclaps overhead: “When I saw any black Clouds gather, or the Wind rise (as I went along) I presently concluded that some dreadful thing would fall out to show what an One I was.”¹⁰⁰⁷ As for Pascal the whole creation testifies to an absent God; so, almost pathologically one might say, for Luther the whole world can seem to testify to one’s guilt. “God can make a wisp of straw as heavy as a hundred hundred-weight of corn, so do not despise those who have only small temptations.”¹⁰⁰⁸ Luther, in Tillich’s words, “experienced the anxiety of guilt and the anxiety of fate. It is the uneasy conscience which produces innumerable irrational fears in daily life. The rustling of a dry leaf horrifies him who is plagued with guilt.”¹⁰⁰⁹ As the conscience drives him out of his mind in its denial of internal respite, so the world crowds him out of external comfort. Within or without: there is no escape from this haunting narrowing presence. “Guilt, death and the mundane press

⁹⁹⁸ Craig Hinkson, ‘Luther and Kierkegaard: Theologians of the Cross’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Volume 3, Number 1, March 2001, p. 41.

⁹⁹⁹ Heineken, *The Moment Before God*, 320

¹⁰⁰⁰ *The Protestant Era*, 163

¹⁰⁰¹ Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, 162

¹⁰⁰² Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 235

¹⁰⁰³ *The Protestant Era*, 162

¹⁰⁰⁴ *W.A.*, 1. 557. 39. Cited in Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 109.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Luther, *W.A.*, 10. 1. ii. 27.14. Cited in Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 108.

¹⁰⁰⁶ *W.A.*, 19. 226. 6. Cited in *Ibid.*, 109. ‘And upon them that are left alive of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth.’ (Lev. 26:36)

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Voices of Madness*, 10

¹⁰⁰⁸ *W.A.*, 45. 397. 2. Cited in Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 108.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Tillich, *The Courage To Be*, 163

in upon man, making the world too 'narrow' for him; no longer is he alone, for now everything speaks to him – as his accuser – yet he remains in this condition alone and defenceless.”¹⁰¹⁰

The inhospitableness of the world is a reflection of one's estrangement from the God from Whom one is alienated, but from Whose gaze one cannot escape. Unable to master the world as one's object, this particularly Unhappy Consciousness becomes the object of a world which refuses to respond to its grasp. The dread of God-forsakenness is enmeshed in the congested tendrils of a sprawling creation. Just as for melancholy the organic world teems with the dangers of nightshade and the mandrake, so in *Anfechtung* accusation grows from every recess. 'And now art thou cursed from the earth,' God tells Cain, 'a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth' (Genesis 4:11, 12). As Rupp describes, "the sinner is hemmed in with anxiety and fear, and his conscience is a prison to him. Cramped, cabined and confined in a kind of spiritual claustrophobia, the experience passes over into its opposite, the restless desire to flee to the ends of the earth, under the desperate certainty that there can be no escape from God.”¹⁰¹¹ Such a sinner is like Jonah the prophet who flees but cannot escape. In his futile flight from the presence of the LORD, Jonah experiences the enmity of creation opposing him in the name of the Creator: the storm (1:4), the whale (1:17), the withering gourd (4:7), and the east wind (4:8) all serve to convict Jonah that he is subject to the machinations of God's world.

In 1840 Kierkegaard paid a pilgrimage to the scene of the childhood transgression that his father had apparently confided to him. It is in his description of the Jutland heath – the alleged site of his father's cursing of God – that one discerns an especially melancholy Lutheran climate, what we might call the very landscape of *Anfechtung* in which one cannot escape naked exposure before God:

The heath must be particularly adapted to developing vigorous spirits; here everything lies naked and unveiled before God, and here is no place for a lot of distractions, those many odd nooks and corners where the consciousness can hide, and from which earnestness often has a hard time recovering vagrant thoughts. Here consciousness must come to definite and precise conclusions about itself. Here on the heath one must truly say, "Whither shall I flee from thy presence?" [Psalm 139:7]¹⁰¹²

But to what extent, beyond the stylistic, can Lutheran *Anfechtung* be translated as Kierkegaardian *Anfægtelse*? In Kierkegaardian *Anfægtelse* does one discover a modern understanding of a medieval idea? Or is Luther's *Anfechtung* a precursor for modern *Angst*? Rupp's suggestion that "We might call it [*Anfechtung*] an existential word since it concerns man as he grapples with himself and the universe" might imply so. "But", Rupp warns, "we must not be misled into supposing that this is mere subjectivism." The crucial factor resides in the location of the human subject before God: "The whole meaning of 'Anfechtung' for Luther lies in the thought that man has his existence 'Coram Deo,' and that he is less the active intelligence imposing itself on the stuff of the universe around him, than the subject of an initiative and action from God who employs the whole of man's existence as a means of bringing men to awareness of their peril or need.”¹⁰¹³ As such, it is not equated with the dread of the

¹⁰¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 167-168

¹⁰¹¹ *The Righteousness of God*, 109

¹⁰¹² JP 3:2830 / Pap. III A 78

¹⁰¹³ *The Righteousness of God*, 106

modern subject as it experiences its loneliness and estrangement from an indifferent cosmos. Here we are returned to the difference between the numinous and the sublime.

Neither is *Anfechtung*, although nourished by the anguished conscience, simply the ontological anxiety inherent within anthropological introspection. Although it denotes an impression of the self's opposition by an other, it is irreducibly theocentric in its orientation of the subject *coram deo*. The God before whom one finds it is dreadful to stand often appears in Luther as the voyeuristic Absolute Subject before Whom one is inescapably object. The anxious sinner, as Luther describes, "is put to sin and shame before God":

...[T]his shame is now a thousand times greater, that a man must blush in the presence of God. For this means that there is no corner or hole in the whole of creation into which a man might creep, not even in hell, but he must let himself be exposed to the gaze of the whole creation, and stand in the open with all his shame, as a bad conscience feels when it is really struck... God takes all honour and comfort away and leaves only shame there, and this is his misery.¹⁰¹⁴

Recalling Nietzsche, this can translate as the experience which precedes and incites Deicide. The desire for flight is thwarted by the inescapable omnipresence of the accusative gaze, and consequently the object retaliates in a murderous act of reclaimed subjectivity. Indeed Tillich, in his sermon on Psalm 139 'The Escape From God', claims that the "Presence of God created the same feeling in Luther as it did Nietzsche."¹⁰¹⁵ Such voyeurism recalls what Sartre identifies as 'The Look' which induces my "shame before God; that is, the recognition of my being-as-object before a subject that can never become an object... I posit my being-an-object-for-God as more real than my For-itself; I exist alienated and I cause myself to learn from outside what I must be. This is the origin of fear before God."¹⁰¹⁶ Thus Sartre's God, as Pattison defines, "is the one who looks at him – and, moreover, the one who looks at him when he does not want to be looked at."¹⁰¹⁷ Sartre has responded, understandably, to an invasive visual interrogation, as exemplified by a passage in *Words*: "I was busy covering up my crime when God suddenly saw me. I felt his gaze inside my head and on my hands... horribly visible, a living target. I was saved by indignation: I grew angry at such a crude lack of tact, and blasphemed... He never looked at me again."¹⁰¹⁸

But in my anxiety over violation by an ultimately alien other – the anxiety by which the rustling leaf whispers the dreadful secret of the wrath of God – have I slipped into the realm of the fantastic? Is this Other merely a fantastic projection of ontological anxiety and guilt? As Sartre might say to Luther in dispelling the terrified conscience tenderised by the mere rustling of a leaf: "perhaps the objects of the world which I took for eyes were not eyes; perhaps it was only the wind which shook the bush behind me".¹⁰¹⁹ However, when modern atheism has not announced itself as such a live option

¹⁰¹⁴ W.A., 19. 216. 27. Cited in Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 108.

¹⁰¹⁵ *The Shaking of the Foundations* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948], 44. Cited in Cornelio Fabro, *God in Exile*, 1012 n.21.

¹⁰¹⁶ *Being and Nothingness*, 290

¹⁰¹⁷ *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, 107

¹⁰¹⁸ *Words*, 70-71. Pattison suggests "This anecdote helps to identify a key element in the meaning that God has for Sartre and thus provides an important clue to the meaning of his atheism." *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, 107

¹⁰¹⁹ *Being and Nothingness*, 276

for Luther, the sinner is seen to respond with a spontaneous impulse to escape confinement through flight rather than the confrontation of atheism. However, from Kierkegaard's perspective, the 'terror threat' can actually signify the authenticity of the God-relationship – in contradistinction to the appeasing Feuerbachian projection in which all such risk is exorcised. As Tillich also argues, "It is safe to say that a man who has never tried to flee God has never experienced the God Who is really God... For there is no reason to flee a god who is the perfect picture of everything that is good in man... Why try to escape from a reality of which we are a part?"¹⁰²⁰ As such, atheism, Tillich identifies, may signify the redirection of the same impulse to flee from the inescapable reality of God as *Anfechtung*.

Yet, if fear and trembling is the only response the divine can evoke in a human subject then we are returned to the question of whether, with this understanding of God, we are not more legitimate in the retaliation of atheism than the self-annihilation of *Anfechtung*. Is it not inevitable that this God, depicted as some kind of invasive *mysterium horrendum*, should warrant the retaliation of Nietzschean rebellion? In such a scheme must the slave legitimately rise up against the Master: the object reclaim itself from the Subject?

Mysterium Horrendum

In Luther's depiction of God as the One before Whom none can stand and from Whom none can escape, one detects strong shades of what Otto later identifies as the numinous. As Otto himself claims, "Indeed I grew to understand the numinous and its difference from the rational in Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio* long before I identified it in the 'qādosh' of the Old Testament and in the elements of 'religious awe' in the history of religion in general."¹⁰²¹ Yet Otto warns that Luther's numinous consciousness risks the dangerously unbalanced privileging of God's awesome non-rational character as representing, in Luther's words, 'Deus ipse, ut est in sua natura et maiestate' ('God Himself, as He is in his own very nature and majesty').¹⁰²² Likewise, Tillich diagnoses the potentially deforming numinous horror implicit in Luther's notion of the 'naked absolute':

The demonic elements in Luther's doctrine of God, his occasional identification of the wrath of God with Satan, the half-divine-half-demonic picture he gives of God's acting in nature and history – all this constitutes the greatness and the danger of Luther's understanding of the holy. The experience he describes certainly is numinous, tremendous, and fascinating, but it is not safeguarded against demonic distortion and against the resurgence of the unclean within the holy.¹⁰²³

¹⁰²⁰ *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 38. Cited in Fabro, *God in Exile*, 1011.

¹⁰²¹ *The Idea of the Holy*, 103

¹⁰²² "...an assumption which would be in fact a dangerous and erroneous one; for no distinction of the non-rational and the rational aspects of God should imply that the latter is less essential than the former." *The Idea of the Holy*, 102

¹⁰²³ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 241

Interestingly, Wessel Stoker criticises Tillich's own view of evil conquered within God for engendering God as a "split being": "If we see it this way, then in my opinion God is no longer the light in whom there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5)... The way in which Tillich sees evil in God as a conquered contradiction is a modern-day version of the old myth that answers the question of the origin of evil by a *theogony*, the story about a struggle among the gods – a struggle that Tillich believes is portrayed within God himself." *Is the Quest for Meaning the Quest for God?*, 67...68

The potential dualism of good and evil *within* the divine nature may betray a barely exorcised or suppressed remnant of a more primitive Satanic shadow revealed in the wrath of God. As Otto identifies the danger of the primal demonic implicit in the ‘ferocity’ of the numinous: “It might be said that Lucifer is ‘fury’, the *ὀργή*, hypostasized, the ‘mysterium tremendum’ cut loose from the other elements and intensified to *mysterium horrendum*.”¹⁰²⁴ One may perceive something of the inherent danger of this perversion of the numinous into the demonic in the myth of Lucifer as a ‘fallen angel’: a deviant mutation of the heavenly and the diabolical. As such, is there something covertly Satanic discernible in the God of Luther’s *Anfechtung*?

One must be aware of how there is a serious sense in Luther’s writings, and indeed in his life and times, of the consistent and substantial threat of a supernatural Satanic reality. Indeed Luther’s world “swarmed with devils and poltergeists.”¹⁰²⁵ The young man’s maternally inherited superstitions rendered him susceptible to what might now be regarded as vulgar belief in witchcraft and the supernatural. “Strange noises in the night, the wind in the forest, the odd behavior of a neighbor... all provoked the conviction that demonic forces went about the world like a roaring lion, seeking whom it might devour.”¹⁰²⁶ Luther recounts how the devil is known to “thump about and haunt houses” and even relates with some satisfaction his own composure in response to a poltergeist incident in the monastery at Wittenberg.¹⁰²⁷ All in all it would be premature in Luther’s time to retire the devil to the archives of psychology or mythology. “Luther’s Devil is by no means disposed of in terms of superstition, catarrh, noises in the head and what are now fashionably described as ‘poltergeist’ phenomena.”¹⁰²⁸ In fact, rather than overcoming medieval belief in the devil, Luther’s imminent eschatological conviction and urgency can be seen to have “intensified it and lent to it additional urgency: Christ and Satan wage a cosmic war for mastery over Church and world.”¹⁰²⁹ Oberman even goes so far as to suggest that Luther’s experience of the devil’s power “affected him as intensely as Christ’s”.¹⁰³⁰

Just as Luther ascribed the negative experience of melancholy to the devil so also does the suffering in *Anfechtung* conceal a Satanic origin. ‘Concealment’ is certainly the correct term since in the afflictions of *Anfechtung* Satan works in secret – in hiddenness against the individual – turning the conscience against itself. As such, when in the horror of guilt one condemns oneself in the sleepless night of damnation, it is the devil who secretly labours in the occult internal labyrinth, subtly tenderising the conscience. In the Satanically cultivated anxiety of predestination the pre-apprehension of the fiery abyss looms large and terrible for the imagination. Consequently the task is to expose the concealed Satanic engine and therefore extricate the conscience from its mechanisms. This cognition – that the devil has deceived one into erroneous self-condemnation – allows one not only to resist Satan

¹⁰²⁴ *The Idea of the Holy*, 110 n.2

¹⁰²⁵ Marius, *Martin Luther*, 27

¹⁰²⁶ Marius, *Martin Luther*, 27

¹⁰²⁷ See Oberman, *Luther*, 105

¹⁰²⁸ Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 347

¹⁰²⁹ Oberman, *Luther*, 104

¹⁰³⁰ *Luther*, 155

but also to discern the true meaning of the temptation as a trial, and the identity of the real antagonist against whom one must fight.

Luther's writings on the sources of *Anfechtung* paint an opaque and potentially disturbing portrait of a Janus-faced God. Whilst it is true that for Luther the devil is the Accuser who opposes humanity, it is also true that in *Anfechtung* one also fights against God as well as this primal serpent. Whilst it is true that Satan is hidden in the conscience's melancholy self-condemnation, God is also hidden behind the demonic orchestrations of the devil. As such, Luther reveals how God implicitly grants to the devil power over human beings in two ways: "first, over the ungodly, when he will punish them by reason of their sins; secondly, over the just and godly, when he intends to try whether they will be constant in the faith, and remain in his obedience. Without God's will and our own consent, the devil cannot hurt us."¹⁰³¹ Here is the God who declares, 'I am the LORD, and there is none besides me. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the LORD do all these things' (Isaiah 45:6-7). In order to avoid a cosmological dualism which would undermine divine omnipotence and compromise eschatological confidence, the devil must be ultimately conceived to be under the control – though not the coalition – of a sovereign God. Understood this way, the life of the devil is lived in the constant desire to afflict us – tempered only by the preservation of God's restraining protection of us. As such, God's loosening of the divine restraint upon Satan is not to be identified with explicit collaboration. "The power the devil exercises is not by God commanded," Luther explains, "but God resists him not, suffering him to make tumults, yet no longer or further than he wills, for God has set him a mark, beyond which he neither can nor dare step."¹⁰³² In the divine withdrawal which must of necessity predicate affliction, we have some sense of the hiddenness of God: what Luther identified as the *Deus absconditus*. It is here that Kierkegaard confesses a significant departure point between his view of *Anfægtelse* and Luther's *Anfechtung*.

Kierkegaard, the Devil, and the Demonic

That Christians must suffer does not come from the devil. The suffering comes from God – and right at this point begins the most extreme spiritual strenuousness in the Christian life.¹⁰³³

Kierkegaard accuses Luther's ascription of *Anfechtung* to Satan of being "more childish than true"¹⁰³⁴: a castigation not so much motivated by Enlightenment condescension towards medieval superstition as the desire to appropriately situate the tension of *Anfægtelse* irreducibly between the individual and God. "No, it is spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*] because it seems to the person himself as if the relationship were stretched too tightly, as if he were venturing too boldly in literally involving himself personally with God and Christ."¹⁰³⁵ Nevertheless, here Kierkegaard does actually concur with Luther's belief that *Anfechtung* is not a nemesis upon worldliness, but is instead elicited and intensified by the proximity of the God-relationship. Luther's devil avenges himself upon a life ventured in faith. "Here", according to Oberman, "is found a radical deviation from the medieval concept of the Devil, according to which the

¹⁰³¹ 'Of the Devil and His Works', DCXX, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, 265

¹⁰³² 'Of the Devil and His Works', DCXIV, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, 263-264

¹⁰³³ JP 2:1447 / Pap. XI² A 130

¹⁰³⁴ JP 4:4372 / Pap. X¹ A 22

evil one is drawn by the smell of sin, the sin of worldly concern.”¹⁰³⁶ Hence Johannes Climacus very Lutherably describes *Anfægtelse* as “the nemesis upon the strong moment in the absolute relationship.”¹⁰³⁷ Nevertheless, since the dialectical antagonism is not situated between God and the Devil but between God and the individual, the Kierkegaardian nemesis must be understood as explicitly divine rather than, as in Luther, apparently satanic and only implicitly from God.

Kierkegaard sees that ascribing *Anfechtung* to Satan is essentially an omission of the real implication of the category: that it comes from above. However, Kierkegaard is cautious not to ascribe all antagonism to God. It takes two to start a fight:

When I say that the interpretation that suffering connected with becoming a Christian comes from the devil is not a truly Christian interpretation but that suffering comes from the God-relationship itself, this must of course be understood with the addition that in one sense suffering also comes from the individual himself, from the fact that his subjectivity cannot immediately and completely surrender to God.¹⁰³⁸

Still Kierkegaard perceives at least a partial truth in antiquated (from Enlightenment Christendom’s stance) discussion of *Anfægtelse*. What is lacking, however, is the sense of self-responsibility:

In older and better devotional literature we read much about thoughts which try the spirit [*anfægtende Tanker*] and cause the individual to suffer, thought described as burning arrows and ascribed to the devil. But this is not a truly Christian interpretation; such thoughts come from the individual himself, although innocently.¹⁰³⁹

Kierkegaard is perhaps alluding here to Luther: “Satan ceases not to plague the Christians, and shoot at us his fiery darts”.¹⁰⁴⁰ But, as noted, at least for John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and Juan de los Angeles, the flaming arrow is unleashed by *God*. And yet these *anfægtende Tanker* are thoughts which, for Kierkegaard, may find their origin in the individual consciousness since such “thoughts that try the spirit [*anfægtende Tanker*]” are “related to the imagination.”¹⁰⁴¹ Consequently, one can be deceived by the imagination concerning *Anfægtelse*. One might therefore ascribe to the activity of the individual imagination Luther’s anxiety’s over the ‘rustling leaf’ which in fantasy’s anxiety becomes the wrath of God.¹⁰⁴²

¹⁰³⁵ JP 4:4372 / Pap. X¹ A 22

¹⁰³⁶ Oberman, *Luther*, 106

¹⁰³⁷ CUP, 411

¹⁰³⁸ JP 4:4384 / Pap. XI² A 132. It should perhaps not be surprising that Kierkegaard, a Danish Lutheran situated historically in the “reaction of the philosophers of the Enlightenment against the superstitious, abominable use of the idea of the demonic in the Middle Ages and in orthodox Protestantism”, (Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, ‘Author’s Preface’, xxxv) seemingly eclipses the role of the devil in his view of *Anfægtelse*. However, Kierkegaard’s own fascination with ‘the demonic’ – though a term more concerned with anthropology than demonology – actually restrains him from fully endorsing the contemporary neglect of the devil. As G. E. Arbaugh identifies, “His experience of temptation, rebellion and isolation coupled with insights from sources such as the legend of Faust, Shakespeare and the Bible lead him to recognize a devilish power largely lost sight of in later Protestantism, and a demonic will in man seldom taken seriously in philosophical ethics since Greek idealism.” G. E. Arbaugh, ‘The Devil’, *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Vol. 5*, 268

¹⁰³⁹ JP 4:4384 / Pap. XI² A 132

¹⁰⁴⁰ ‘Of the Devil and His Works’, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, DCXI, 262

¹⁰⁴¹ JP 4:4383 / Pap. XI² A 33

¹⁰⁴² However, Luther himself seems to have been aware of the embellishing tendencies of one’s own imagination. As such, “Luther favors occasionally partaking of the Eucharist without confession, ‘that

However, while emphasising individual responsibility, Kierkegaard's ascription of *Anfægtelse* to divine rather than satanic agency does not validate a dismissive exorcism of the power of the devil. It is a redirection which serves another purpose: specifically an insistence on divine sovereignty.

When I raise objection in several places to the conception which everywhere introduces the devil as the source of suffering for the Christian, it is not my intention to explain away this power. Indeed, the New Testament itself also presents Christ as having been tempted [*fristet*] by the devil.

No, my aim is to block the idea so easily smuggled in, the idea that God has a cause in the human sense – and simultaneously the criterion for being a Christian is readily reduced.

... If the situation is such that God is a Majesty who is embattled with the devil, another Majesty, and wants to have Christians for this battle in order to make use of them in this battle, it is then impossible to maintain the ideal qualifications for being a Christian.¹⁰⁴³

Kierkegaard is here desperate to avoid suggestion of any dualism that would compromise the absolute and unconditioned character of the divine. Once the devil is asserted as a cosmic protagonist with genuine potency, then God is thereby cast against an opposite with whom to struggle for eschatological destiny. In this cosmic dualism the Christian becomes a foot-soldier of God in the war against the devil. As such, the “ideal” qualifications for being a Christian are readily reduced to a conscription into eschatological warfare. God “needs” individuals insofar as a Majesty needs good servicemen. Rather, for Kierkegaard, humanity is in need of God – a divinity who does not have “a cause in the human sense” – who is not pitched in a desperate struggle with an opposite. Once the devil is asserted as a cosmic protagonist with genuine potency, then the radical ideal of being a Christian is compromised by the principal location of enmity between God and the devil. Instead, in the fear and trembling of *Anfægtelse*, one cannot escape the understanding that the intrinsic antagonism exists in the infinite qualitative abyss between the individual and God. “It is clear that much of what Luther explained (an explanation which actually needs its own explanation) as the work of the devil – quite as if the devil were actually able to set limits upon God – may be explained by the discrepancy between God's infinite majesty and man.”¹⁰⁴⁴

The Face of God

Nevertheless, in his anxious evasion of dualism, Kierkegaard could be seen to actually reveal more of a fundamental affinity with Luther than he acknowledges.¹⁰⁴⁵ God's withdrawal and ‘unleashing’ of Satan may appear to imply a tacit responsibility which inescapably implicates the Divine in the administration of affliction. Luther's ascription of *Anfechtung* to the devil often implies an occult ascription to God: the God who is secretly at work, without whose implicit permission Satan could not

a man may learn to trust in the mercy of God' rather than in his own diligence. This is not despising the sacrament or tempting God, if it is done to 'accustom a troubled conscience to trust God and not to tremble at the rustling of every falling leaf'.” John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls*, 167

¹⁰⁴³ JP 4:4384 / Pap. XI² 133

¹⁰⁴⁴ JP 4:4949 / Pap. X4 A 487

¹⁰⁴⁵ “In the end, therefore, Luther saw God behind trial. We are directly tempted by the Devil, the world, and our own carnal selves; but it is part of God's training that we should be subject to trial, and therefore we should always be forced to prayer. In the petition, ‘Lead us not into temptation’ we pray

wreak havoc against God's servant Job.¹⁰⁴⁶ One apparently fights with the Devil, but in fact "Luther urges the Christian on such occasions to *fight against God himself* – a bold exhortation that suggests that God *himself* is the source of *Anfechtung*."¹⁰⁴⁷ As such, Luther's demonology may obscure where his anatomy of *Anfechtung* is closer to Kierkegaard's own. This is the revealed secret truth of the conflict, as when Jacob realises the stature of the one he wrestles with: he realises the name of his assailant in the assailant's refusal to disclose that name, and so he names the place Peni'el. "Now the meaning of 'Peni'el' is 'face of God'", as Luther himself notes:

But 'face of God' is nothing else but knowledge of God. Nobody knows God except through faith in his word. The word and promises of God declare nothing but consolation and grace in Christ; therefore, whoever believes them sees God's mercy and goodness. This amounts to knowing God properly and this makes the heart joyful and blessed, as David says in Psalm 4 [:6-7]: 'Raise up the light of your countenance over us thereby you bestow joy upon my heart.' And Psalm 80 [:3] says: 'O God, show us your face, then we shall be blessed.'¹⁰⁴⁸

Luther's apparently ambivalent doctrine of God divulges that "Satan was finally God's Satan, doing in a perverse way God's will. It was almost to suggest that 'Satan' was the name Luther gave to those powers and actions of God that take place outside of Christ, that God himself is divided."¹⁰⁴⁹ Although divine omnipotence prohibits any dualism between God and Satan, there is a dualism ostensibly residing in this doctrine of God himself – albeit a dualism which appears esoteric and fluctuating, not a static contrast of opposites. The apparent fluidity between the God of good and God of evil renders a critically disorienting identity crisis in Luther's understanding of the divine. As Hinkson writes, "the very ascription of *Anfechtung* to the devil is tantamount to an ascription to God, the devil being *God's* devil, or 'mask'... If, in *Anfechtung*, *God* is our assailant, then perhaps it is not *merely* with his 'mask' that we have to do; perhaps it is with God *himself* – i.e., the predestining God."¹⁰⁵⁰ Yet one may say that Kierkegaard causes the Lutheran mask to slip, not solely through Enlightenment sophistication, but from a desire to expose responsibility for the antagonism of the infinite qualitative difference between the individual and God.

In the struggle with God one is not immediately initiated into the 'knowledge of God' so much as one is confronted with the doubt [German – *Zweifel*] between the two [*Zwei*] 'faces' of God which intensifies into despair [*Verzweiflung*]. Just as Jacob questioned the identity of his mysterious assailant, so "in the absence of faith the Christian is utterly without a clue as to the true nature of the deity that assails him."¹⁰⁵¹ Humanly speaking, Kierkegaard writes, despair therefore presents itself as an understandable response in the absence of faith.

that God, without removing the trial, will give us strength to resist it." Niels Thulstrup, 'Trial, Test, Tribulation, Temptation', *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Vol. 16*, 107

¹⁰⁴⁶ Kierkegaard seems aware of the ultimate governance of God over the devil in Luther when he cites approvingly: "In one of Luther's table-talks he tells how he acts when the devil tempts [*anfægter*] him during the night. He says to him: My good Satan, you must really let me have peace now, for you know it is God's will that man shall work by day and sleep by night." (JP 3:2526 / Pap. X³ A 335)

¹⁰⁴⁷ Hinkson, *Kierkegaard's Theology: Cross and Grace*, Ph.D. diss. University of Chicago, 36-37

¹⁰⁴⁸ 'The Gospel for the Sunday After Christmas', *Luther's Works, Vol. 52 – Sermons II*, 129-130

¹⁰⁴⁹ Marius, *Martin Luther*, 78

¹⁰⁵⁰ *Kierkegaard's Theology: Cross and Grace*, 38

¹⁰⁵¹ Hinkson, *Kierkegaard's Theology: Cross and Grace*, 38

That the unconditioned can be the divine, that what occasions so much torment and trouble can be the divine, cannot be grasped by a man before he has surrendered to it and learned from the unconditioned itself that it is the divine. If a man continues with this purely human outlook, then the unconditioned is the devil, or God is the evil, as modern French philosophy [i.e. Proudhon] maintains, God is the evil in the sense that he is guilty of all man's unhappiness; if we could only eliminate the unconditioned, knock all ideals out of our heads, everything would go well – but God makes us unhappy, he is the evil.¹⁰⁵²

Insofar as the God-relationship causes profound unhappiness and torment, one may feel legitimate in fleeing the unconditioned as evil. "To exist before God [or *coram deo* as Luther would say] may seem unendurable", to recall the 'fantasised' words of Anti-Climacus.¹⁰⁵³ But the authentic divine nature of the unconditioned can only be learned from the unconditioned itself. According to Luther's resolution of this unendurable assault, one may flee *Anfechtung*, but by fleeing in faith one actually flees into the arms of God. In the anguish of *Anfechtung* Luther "instructs us to cling to Christ – *fleeing*, in effect, from the God who is hidden to the God who is revealed."¹⁰⁵⁴ In fact, Luther's notion of God seems to work itself out in the fear and trembling of the dreadful dialectic between the Face of God as annihilation and the Face of God as Jesus Christ; between the *Deus Absconditus* and the *Deus Revelatus*, the Spirit of *mortificatio* and *illuminatio*.¹⁰⁵⁵ As Luther has it, the Face of God becomes the 'knowledge of God'. Similarly, the 'masked' face of God, and the 'averted face of God' are answered by the 'facies Dei revelata' (revealed face of God).

In Christ is discovered more than our refuge from a wrathful God. In the passion (*passio*- 'suffering') of Christ is witnessed the empathic and authentic response to the trials of *Anfechtung*. As such our tribulations are sanctified by Christ's tears of blood insofar as they testify to the presence of *Anfechtung* in a sinless humanity – though that is not to say that our own *Anfechtung* never relates to our sinfulness, or that Christ's tribulations were identical to ours. Nevertheless, Christ's anguish at Gethsemane transfigures our own trials through divine solidarity. Christ endured temptations from the devil, and yet he also endured the opposition of wills with the Father. So it is only in light of the *mysterium tremendum* that, for Otto, one can comprehend Christ's Agony in the garden. 'Father, let this cup pass from me', as Luther interprets:

Here the will was against the will, yet he turned himself presently according to his Father's will and was comforted by an angel. Christ, who in our flesh was plagued and tempted, is the best mediator and advocate with God, in our tribulation.¹⁰⁵⁶

Similarly, Christ is our solidarity in the sense of desolation which accompanies apparent God-forsakenness. Luther's exposition of Christ's cry on the cross – 'My God, my god, why have you forsaken me?' – "paints with terrible and sombre realism the horror of 'Anfechtung' and sets over

¹⁰⁵² JP 4:4911 / Pap. XI¹ A 516

¹⁰⁵³ SUD, 32

¹⁰⁵⁴ Hinkson, *Kierkegaard's Theology: Cross and Grace*, 37

¹⁰⁵⁵ "The Creator Spirit comes to mortify, to convict of sin before God. Thus, like the human spirit, it begins in conflict and works through transformation into a new creation... Mortification – to convict of sin – sounds dark and oppressive, but as an act of the Creator Spirit, it is intended to be just the opposite." James E. Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 110

¹⁰⁵⁶ 'Of Temptation and Tribulation', DCXLVIII, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, 274

against it the ‘angefochtene Christus’, the Saviour who trod the whole grim path of ‘Anfechtung’ for us.”¹⁰⁵⁷

Insofar as for Luther the Face of God “becomes historically and empirically concrete in the person of Jesus Christ”,¹⁰⁵⁸ there is a revelation not solely of the nature of human suffering, but of the nature of God. The *metanoia* inherent in recognising Christ as the Face of God involves a soteriological transition from the idea of the *Deus absconditus* to the *Deus revelatus*, from wrath to mercy. In his own life, “It is in the tower experience that Luther affirms that Jesus Christ is the Face of God, and this shifts his understanding from the just God who condemns to the just God who justifies.”¹⁰⁵⁹ However, emphasis upon the dualistic nature of this process obscures the integrity of the Spirit at the heart of Luther’s concept of God: the *Spiritus Creator* is the *one* Spirit of both *mortificatio* and *illuminatio*. What makes Luther’s theology so radical, as Otto explains, is that in overcoming these “gulfs and abysses” in the understanding it is “the unapproachable which becomes approachable, the Holy One who is pure goodness, that it is ‘Majesty’ which makes itself familiar and intimate”.¹⁰⁶⁰ Once again, in striving with *Anfechtung* the flight for Luther is one from God to God. Tillich describes this well:

For those who are aware of their estrangement from God, God is the threat of ultimate destruction. His face takes on demonic traits. However, those who are reconciled to him realise that, although their experience of the wrath of God was genuine, it was not experience of a God other than the one to whom they are reconciled... He [Luther] perceives God as the God of wrath, rightly so in preliminary terms, wrongly so in ultimate terms.¹⁰⁶¹

“[D]ialectically complicated almost to the point of madness”: Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of *Anfægtelse*

The most effective means of escaping spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*] is to become spiritless, and the sooner the better.¹⁰⁶²

The presence of the eternal in an individual is indicated by the willingness to freely enter the tomb of their resurrection: “Just as one knows that an insect wants to become a butterfly when it begins to spin a cocoon.”¹⁰⁶³ Yet the danger is that not everyone who enters into this combustible tension between humanity and God will emerge transformed by the metamorphosis of spirit. “Spirit is fire”, but there is, Kierkegaard warns, always a danger in casting oneself to the flames: “not all are burned out to spirit, a few are burned out to ashes – that is, they do not become spirit in the fire.”¹⁰⁶⁴

Spiritual trial is vanishing in modernity. The broad and blithe path of spiritlessness is a route sheltered from *Anfægtelse*. “Never involve yourself with God so long that any spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*] has a chance to begin; if you think about God once a week and bow before him the way

¹⁰⁵⁷ Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 238. See *W.A.*, 5. 493. 27.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 119

¹⁰⁵⁹ Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit*, 242

¹⁰⁶⁰ *The Idea of the Holy*, 103

¹⁰⁶¹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, 89

¹⁰⁶² CA, 117

¹⁰⁶³ JP 4:4712 / Pap. XI¹ A 377

¹⁰⁶⁴ JP 4:4355 / Pap. XI² A 41. Bonhoeffer contends “Whether Christ will give himself to the tempted man in grace and faith is always in the balance, therefore temptation [*Anfechtung*] should never be regarded as a dialectical point of transition on the road to faith... it is the real end of the sinner, his death; that life should grow out of death is the free gift of God to his communion... God can allow man

the others do, I guarantee that you will never be subjected to spiritual trials.”¹⁰⁶⁵ In fact, Christendom’s bourgeois capitulation is reflected in the decline of this particular sickness of the soul. “Because religion is not taken seriously nowadays in Christendom, there is never a hint about spiritual trials [*Anfægtelser*]. Life is just not lived religiously; this can be proved indirectly by the disappearance of spiritual trial.”¹⁰⁶⁶ At times Kierkegaard seems determined to shock Christendom back into Christianity, whilst remaining anxious that Christianity is not mutated into the madness or nightmare of the fantastic. *Anfægtelse* is not to be forced upon one in the counterfeiting of Lutheran inwardness, nor should it, like melancholy, be cultivated in self-mortification. It is for the ‘common man’, the individual, whom God will not test beyond his bearing. *Anfægtelse* is bound to come, but each believer must discover this for oneself. One is not called to be a repetition of Luther.¹⁰⁶⁷

In empathy with the notion of *imitatio Christi* present in Lutheran theology,¹⁰⁶⁸ Kierkegaard was concerned with the voluntary suffering of Christ’s passion. As such, Christ’s cry of ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ signifies “freedom’s ultimate spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*].”¹⁰⁶⁹ It is the invitation to a struggle which, following Christ, must be accepted voluntarily by each believer.¹⁰⁷⁰ “When the voluntary disappears, ‘spiritual trial’ [*Anfægtelse*] disappears, and when spiritual trials disappear, Christianity disappears – as it has disappeared in Christendom.”¹⁰⁷¹ Despite Kierkegaard’s often extravagant evocations, *Anfægtelse* must be voluntarily entered into in the daily arena of the mundane; not in the cloister, the tower, or the pulpit. “If one puts on the religious for everyday use, the spiritual trials [*Anfægtelse*] are bound to come.”¹⁰⁷² Or as Johannes Climacus declares, “in the living-room must the battle be fought, not fantastically in the church, so that the clergyman is fighting windmills and the spectators watch the show.”¹⁰⁷³ As such, it is a struggle which is neither quixotic nor theatrical. It is not reserved for the heroic moment in which one buckles one’s sword and rides out like Don Quixote; rather such a Knight of Faith “looks like a tax-collector”.¹⁰⁷⁴

to die ‘of’ the knowledge of his sin, and can lead him through this death into the communion with Christ.” *Act and Being*, 168-169

¹⁰⁶⁵ JP 2:1354 / Pap. VIII¹ A 77

¹⁰⁶⁶ JP 4:4372 / Pap. X¹ A 22

¹⁰⁶⁷ “[Kierkegaard] asserts that Luther’s personal trial was not the normal one, but something peculiar, for which reason it is also wrong to consider, with ‘Protestantism’, Luther as the typical Christian living in mortal dread and trial.” (N. Thulstrup, ‘Trial, Test, Tribulation, Temptation’, 117)

Note, however, that Luther himself seems to appreciate the relativity of *Anfechtung*: “God can make a wisp of straw as heavy as a hundred hundred-weight of corn, so do not despise those who have only small temptations.” (*W.A.* 45. 397. 2)

¹⁰⁶⁸ See Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography*, 394-95 and 484 n.26. Such theological heritage included the full Danish translation of Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471) *De imitatione Christi* (the same year Kierkegaard wrote *Practice In Christianity*), Johann Arndt (1555-1621) and H. A. Brorson (1694-1764), lines from whose hymn adorns Kierkegaard’s memorial. See also Bukdahl, *Søren Kierkegaard and The Common Man*, 130

¹⁰⁶⁹ JP 4:4611 (continuation of 4610 with double crosshatching over it) / Pap VIII¹ A 580.

Kierkegaard is cautious to qualify that, as only human, one cannot comprehend Christ’s own cry of divinity abandoned by divinity; a point he iterates in ‘The Gospel of Sufferings’.

¹⁰⁷⁰ According to Hinkson “it is Luther’s presumed failure to have recognised the voluntary nature of Christian suffering which earns S.K.’s sharpest rebuke.” *Kierkegaard’s Theology: Cross and Grace*, 77-78

¹⁰⁷¹ JP 4:4950 / Pap. X³ A 43

¹⁰⁷² JP 4:4364 / Pap. VI A 2

¹⁰⁷³ CUP, 416

¹⁰⁷⁴ FT, 30

And yet such a person, whose life is transfigured by faith, is an all too hidden exception: “Spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*] is the expression of a concentration upon Christianity as the only object. That is why most men have no spiritual trials.”¹⁰⁷⁵ As Johannes Climacus writes, it is only in the attempt to relate oneself absolutely to the absolute, that one “discovers the limit, and the conflict of *Anfechtung* [*Anfægtelse*] becomes an expression of this limit... no one who is not very religious [Johannes Climacus includes himself here] will be exposed to *Anfechtung*, for *Anfechtung* is precisely the reaction to the absolute expression for the absolute relationship.”¹⁰⁷⁶

Again, as Kierkegaard himself writes, “In the words of the preachers, *every* man ought to relate himself to God in *all things*, ought to refer *everything* to God.”¹⁰⁷⁷ Yet the preacher is wrong in assuming that such a relation constitutes the resolution of *Anfægtelse* – as if the concentration upon Christianity actually delivers one from it. In actual fact, the more one refers all things in their specificity and finitude to the Infinite and the Absolute, the more one will encounter the collision, the nemesis of *Anfægtelse* upon the God-relation. It is this that Johannes Climacus calls “the reaction of the limit against the finite individual”; the *Anfægtelse* which increases “quite properly in proportion to the intensity of the religiosity.”¹⁰⁷⁸ In other words, as religiosity intensifies so, correspondingly, does the conflict. Autobiographically Kierkegaard writes:

Spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*] is the divine repulsion in the *quid nimis* and can never fail to appear if one is to exist religiously, consequently as an actual, definite particular man¹⁰⁷⁹ – for example, I, Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, thirty-five years old, of slight build, master of arts, brother-in-law of businessman Lund, living on such and such a street – in short, this whole concretion of trivialities, that I dare relate myself to God, refer all the affairs of my life to him. No man has ever lived who has truly done this without discovering with horror the horror of spiritual trial, that he might be venturing too boldly, that the whole thing might really be lunacy.¹⁰⁸⁰

The entire endeavour becomes too arduous; the opposition of the Absolute to the individual is altogether too intense. The whole thing might really be madness. Yet, this strenuous incommensurability between spirit and spiritlessness is “authentic Christian religiousness”, as Kierkegaard sees it; “whether or not such a person like this is to be found, I do not know; I have never seen one.”¹⁰⁸¹

Nevertheless, Kierkegaard continues in this entry to refer specifically to how Luther’s own “Spiritedness” is authenticated by his persecution. “Genuinely spiritual persons are so rare that they can be handled appropriately as exceptions.”¹⁰⁸² Is Luther such an exception? His anxious conscience certainly needed treatment, according to Kierkegaard. The scrupulant inwardness of Luther and the bourgeois complacency of the typically spiritless individual can be read as forming contrasting

¹⁰⁷⁵ JP 4:4365 / Pap. VIII¹ A 47

¹⁰⁷⁶ CUP, 411

¹⁰⁷⁷ JP 4:4372 / Pap. X¹ A 22

¹⁰⁷⁸ CUP, 410

¹⁰⁷⁹ “It is Christian heroism – a rarity, to be sure – to venture wholly to become oneself, an individual being, this specific individual human being, alone before God, alone in this prodigious strenuousness and this prodigious responsibility;” (SUD, ‘Preface’, 5)

¹⁰⁸⁰ JP 4:4372 / Pap. X¹ A 22

¹⁰⁸¹ JP 4:4372 / Pap. X¹ A 22

¹⁰⁸² JP 4:4373 / Pap. X¹ A 452 n.d., 1849

dialectical points for a Kierkegaardian understanding of *Anfægtelse*. There is “something dialectical” – and therefore in need of temperance as Kierkegaard regards it – between the unwillingness to be spirit, and the desire to “to be far too much spirit” and therefore want to “love God more or differently than God will tolerate.”¹⁰⁸³ Such willing to be completely spirit can either betray a “spiritual pride”, or reveal one to be a “self-tormentor”, or even guilty of “an overstrained dejection which actually demands too much of God and of itself.”¹⁰⁸⁴ As such, in the trial of *Anfægtelse* there are necessary exceptions. As if with the pragmatism characteristic of a monastic treatise on sicknesses of the soul Kierkegaard prescribes:

The norm, therefore, is: in a few exceptional cases recommend diversionary aids, but as a rule prescribe aids of the spirit, for men use diversionary aids all too promiscuously of their own accord. The exceptions are the sick, for whom diversionary aids are prescribed; most people are much too robust, so the operation is precisely to make them a little sick, a little weak – by prescribing that they use the aids of the spirit.¹⁰⁸⁵

Here is an apparent instance of a dialectical form of temperance between spiritual sickness and health. The sick soul must ground itself in diversion so as to avoid an unrealisable and presumptuous insistence upon becoming completely spirit. Similarly as Johannes Climacus describes it, the desire to express religiousness infinitely renders the finite incommensurable: the absolute consciousness of God ultimately consumes one.¹⁰⁸⁶ The desire to become spirit absolutely actually betrays a desire to transcend suffering: an attempt to violate the infinite difference between humanity and God.

To bring the relative into relation with God may seem impossible, but yet there is a vital divine concession by which no one will be tested beyond what they can bear:

He strengthens himself perhaps by means of the edifying consideration that God who made man must Himself know best of all the many things that may seem impossible to bring into connection with the thought of God, all this earthly distress, all the confusion in which he may be involved, and the necessity of diversion, of rest, even of sleep.¹⁰⁸⁷

The absolute difference is thus expressed in humility; not the monastic flight from the world which, according to Johannes Climacus, betrays “an attempt to be superhuman, an enthusiastic, perhaps even a devout attempt to resemble God.”¹⁰⁸⁸ And so, lest one dies of the *Anfægtelse* in which one is confined by the absolute conception of God, one permits measured distraction to come back in as a concession for the fact that no one can become spirit absolutely – an expression of the infinite qualitative difference.

Nevertheless, one must not become distracted to the extent of fleeing from the God-relationship itself. Such a tactic of confronting *Anfægtelse* is apparent in its differentiation from temptation [*Fristelse*]. The difference is that *Anfægtelse* originates in the God-relationship and so is something that must not be evaded. Temptation [*Fristelse*] is that seduction which one must distract oneself from. Hence the relation is clearer in Lowrie’s translation of *For Self-Examination*, where

¹⁰⁸³ JP 4:4373 / Pap. X¹ A 452 n.d., 1849

¹⁰⁸⁴ JP 4:4373 / Pap. X¹ A 452 n.d., 1849

¹⁰⁸⁵ JP 4:4373 / Pap. X¹ A 452 n.d., 1849

¹⁰⁸⁶ CUP, 433

¹⁰⁸⁷ CUP, 437

¹⁰⁸⁸ CUP, 440

Fristelse is translated as “alluring temptations” and *Anfægtelse* is comparatively rendered “deterrent temptations”. One must flee what is alluring (tempting) and confront that which is deterrent (*Anfægtelse*). The temptation [*Fristelse*], which can be identified as coming from the devil, is differentiated from the *Anfægtelse* which Kierkegaard situates firmly in the battlefield between the individual and God. In reference to the words of James 4:7 ‘Resist the devil, and he will flee from you’, Kierkegaard notes:

This, then, is the tactic. Not the reverse: Flee the devil – this can be the tactic only in relation to temptation [*Fristelse*].

Here we see that spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*] lies a whole quality higher than temptation... Spiritual trial can be fought only with the rashness of faith, which charges head-on.¹⁰⁸⁹

Essentially *Anfægtelse* occurs in opposition, and yet it is an opposition which must be confronted and not evaded: “the temptation [*Fristelse*] to sin is in accord with inclination, [the temptation] of spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*] [is] contrary to inclination.”¹⁰⁹⁰ Or, as Johannes Climacus explains, “*Anfægtelse* is in the sphere of the God-relationship what temptation [*Fristelse*] is in the ethical sphere... In temptation, it is the lower that tempts, in *Anfægtelse* it is the higher; in temptation, it is the lower that allures the individual, in *Anfægtelse* it is the higher that, as if jealous of the individual tries to frighten him back.”¹⁰⁹¹ In other words, temptation is an enticement towards what one desires which must be evaded, while *Anfægtelse* is a confrontation with that which one fears which must be entered into. The difference can be seen exemplified in Christ: the temptations of Christ in the wilderness were at the hands of the devil and he turned away from them; the agony in the Garden was an *Anfægtelse* which he confronted in the battlefield of prayer.

As in the treatment of *acedia* through tactical countermeasures, the desert fathers often prescribed the countering of temptations by evasion and distraction: by the contemplation of enticement’s opposite.¹⁰⁹² *Anfægtelse*, on the contrary, is usually tackled head-on through confrontation. However, as in the exceptional case (and perhaps Luther was one in Kierkegaard’s view) of those who become too sick in their self-torment, Kierkegaard is willing to prescribe a moderate use of diversionary tactics

¹⁰⁸⁹ JP 4:4378 / Pap. X⁴ A 95

¹⁰⁹⁰ JP 4:4367 / Pap. VIII¹ A 93

¹⁰⁹¹ CUP, 410. Insofar as it entices a fall away from the ethical, “Temptation is in continuity with the individual’s ethical character, whereas spiritual trial lacks continuity and is a mark of the resistance offered by the absolute as it lays down the limit.” Thulstrup, *Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 349

¹⁰⁹² As Sorabji discusses, for example, the desert Father Evagrius of Pontus (AD c. 345-99) in studying the interrelation of emotions, sought an *apatheia* (freedom from emotion) by ‘playing one bad thought off against another’ (See *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, 360f). Evagrius prescribes:

“The demon of vanity opposes the demon of fornication... So if either of these two approaches and puts you under pressure, imagine in yourself the thoughts of the opposite demon [suggesting that such thoughts are humanly, not supernaturally, inspired]. And if you are able to knock out the one proverbial nail with another, know that you are near the frontiers of *apatheia*.”

(*Practical Treatise*, ch. 58, cited in Sorabji, 361)

against self-mortification.¹⁰⁹³ As Evagrius aspired to *apatheia* as a means of transcending temptation, Kierkegaard also recommends the tactic of *indifference* as a possible means of confronting and overcoming the anxiety of *Anfægtelse*.¹⁰⁹⁴

[T]he most absolute indifference to them [‘thoughts that try the spirit’ – *anfægtende Tanker*] is itself the victory. Such thoughts want to make you anxious, want to worry you to the point where your spirit is so weak and cowardly that you imagine that you are responsible for them... Once they have made you think this, the devil is loose. Therefore be absolutely indifferent; be more indifferent to them than you are to a little rumbling in your stomach. Or get angry, as angry as you get when someone rings your doorbell at an inopportune time and you rush out and say: What kind of an uproar is this! – That is, get angry just short of being afraid, for this is precisely what should be avoided.¹⁰⁹⁵

Temptation [*Fristelse*] is best fought by running away, avoiding it. But this does not work with thoughts that try the spirit, for they pursue you. Here the tactic must be: do not get frightened, remain utterly calm, absolutely indifferent.¹⁰⁹⁶

This may appear a slightly confusing prescription. How can indifference be a means of confrontation? Is there not a contradiction between the passivity of composed indifference and retaliatory anger? But, as Keeley identifies, in this context “Both indifference and anger can be ways to deny responsibility, to shift the focal point of responsibility away from the self to another.”¹⁰⁹⁷ And yet to an extent one is responsible for, though not thereby guilty of, *Anfægtelse* – resulting as it does from the infinite qualitative difference. To a degree one must take some responsibility for the conflict between self and God; but Kierkegaard is here referring to specific thoughts [*anfægtende Tanker*] which try to make one anxious, or guilty. Essentially *Anfægtelse* must be confronted seriously and temperately, but without capitulating through fear into an irremediable guilt. It is such fear which is precisely *Anfægtelse*’s moment of death through which, figuratively speaking, the devil is loose and one is anxious to the point of imagining that one is guilty because of it. This is “the anxiety of spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*]”.¹⁰⁹⁸ Once perspective is lost and one becomes guilty or afraid then one will believe that God has abandoned one; that God is no consolation in the tension of *Anfægtelse*. This apparent God-forsakenness is itself

¹⁰⁹³ However, for many sufferers submission is the only recourse. The attempt to flee from trying thoughts in anxiety only serves to exacerbate further anxiety: “In anxiety he flees from them in every way; he perhaps strains to the point of despair all his powers of ingenuity and concentration in order to avoid not only them but even the remotest contact with anything that could be related to them. It does not help; the anxiety becomes even greater. Neither does the usual advice help – to forget, to escape, for that is just what he is doing, but it merely nourishes the anxiety.” (JP 4:4370 / Pap. IX A 333)

¹⁰⁹⁴ This is, however, not identical with Vigilius Haufniensis’s own ironic evasion tactic: “The most effective means of escaping spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*] is to become spiritless, and the sooner the better.” (CA, 117)

¹⁰⁹⁵ This recalls Kierkegaard’s previously mentioned reference to Luther’s indifference towards the devil for disturbing him at night: “In one of Luther’s table-talks he tells how he acts when the devil tempts [*anfægter*] him during the night. He says to him: My good Satan, you must really let me have peace now, for you know it is God’s will that man shall work by day and sleep by night.” (JP 3:2526 / Pap. X³ A 335). Also Luther talks about his unruffled response to the devil’s crashing about in the monastery late at night. See Oberman, *Luther*, 105.

¹⁰⁹⁶ JP 4:4382 / Pap. XI² A 30

¹⁰⁹⁷ ‘Spiritual Trial in the Thought of Kierkegaard’, 322

¹⁰⁹⁸ JP 4:4374 / Pap. X¹ A 477

what Kierkegaard ominously calls “the last spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*].”¹⁰⁹⁹ And it is at this point that, like Luther, Kierkegaard turns to Christ’s own trial.

The Last Trial

For Kierkegaard, as for Luther, “The school of spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*] is a frightful school.”¹¹⁰⁰ It is a school that is designed for the spiritual upbringing, the “educational torture”, of the believer.

Nevertheless, the danger of *Anfægtelse* resides in the fact that it can be “very painful and excruciating and, in addition, dialectically complicated almost to the point of madness; if it may be thought of in this way, it is, to define it teleologically, an educational torture which, whatever else, is intended to break all self-centred willfulness.”¹¹⁰¹ This “educational torture” must be submitted to in the self-annihilating confession that “Before you, O God, I am nothing; do with me as you will, let me suffer all this which almost drives me to madness; you are still the one to whom wisdom and understanding belong, the loving Father... If this agony collides with a passionate self-centred willfulness which cannot become nothing before God, it must end up with the sufferer losing his mind.”¹¹⁰²

Just as love intensified can mutate into a “revulsion for the beloved”, so can over-occupation with one’s suffering engender a “religious spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*], also found described by older writers, in which a disgust for the religious sets in”¹¹⁰³. The sufferer must not lose sight of the God of love lest *Anfægtelse* capitulates into the despair of God-forsakenness: its own moment of death. In terms categorical of *Anfægtelse*, Kierkegaard writes, “In a moment of impatience it must seem to him as if children torturing a butterfly could not inflict worse torture than he is suffering.” And this is the God one must not abandon! “One thing he must do: not despair of the possibility of salvation, not-abandon God. People talk of abandoning oneself, but this is rubbish; it is a matter of abandoning God.” He must not flee from these thoughts in the self-aggravation of anxiety. Rather, in agonising and crucifying contradiction, “his salvation lies right here, in his acquiring the frankness to think these evil thoughts together with God before God – in order to dispose of them.”¹¹⁰⁴

So this suffering is intensified in the collision between the agony of suffering and the thought that God is love: the thinking of these apparently incommensurable thoughts together.

Humanly speaking, a person who is experiencing such suffering is justified in saying:
The whole thing would be far less agonizing to me if I did not have the idea of God

¹⁰⁹⁹ JP 4:4699 / Pap. X5 A 38. Rupp identifies six waves of attack in Luther’s notion of *Anfechtung*: In the first wave the soul experiences its nakedness and shame before creation. In the second wave, all creation appears to condemn. In the third wave, scripture is brought to condemn. In the fourth wave, the Gospel adds to the terror of the Law. In the fifth wave, the soul turns from Christ. Finally, the soul believes it is not predestined to damnation (God-forsaken). *The Righteousness of God*, 238-239

¹¹⁰⁰ JP 4:4376 / Pap. X² A 182. Also, “God is the Teacher” in the “school of sufferings”. (‘That the School of Sufferings Fits us For Eternity’, *Gospel of Sufferings*, 57). Luther compares *Anfechtung* to a father thrashing a child (*W.A. T.R.* 2, 2701). As Hinkson writes, “*Anfechtung*, then, is an expression of fatherly discipline; it is the ‘school’ through which God puts his children in order that they may come to know themselves, and him.” (*Kierkegaard’s Theology: Cross and Grace*, 38)

¹¹⁰¹ JP 4:4370 / Pap. IX A 333

¹¹⁰² JP 4:4370 / Pap. IX A 333

¹¹⁰³ JP 4:4377 / Pap. X² A 590

¹¹⁰⁴ JP 4:4377 / Pap. X² A 590

along with it. The pain lies either in being left helpless by God, the omnipotent, who could so easily help, or in the crucifixion of one's understanding, that in spite of all this God is love and that what happens is for one's own good.¹¹⁰⁵

Indeed it requires a faith to reconcile the apparently incompatible love of God with human suffering; a faith Johannes de Silentio, for one, confesses is beyond him:

I have seen the dreadful before my own eyes... I am unable to make the movements of faith, I cannot shut my eyes and plunge confidently into the absurd, for me that is an impossibility... but I do not boast of it. I am convinced that God is love, this thought has for me a primitive lyrical validity. When it is present to me, I am unspeakably blissful, when it is absent, I long for it more vehemently than does the lover for his object; but I do not believe, this courage I lack. For me the love of God is, both in a direct and in an inverse sense, incommensurable with the whole of reality.¹¹⁰⁶

As in the plight of Job, one might say that "Suffering is not the problem; God is. Without a belief in a personal God human suffering is simply a part of life, concomitant to the human condition."¹¹⁰⁷ Except, where *Anfægtelse* is concerned, this is a form of suffering that would not even exist if there were no infinite qualitative difference, if there were no God! The true *Anfægtelse* resides in the appearance that "it is as if the God-idea itself intensified one's agony."¹¹⁰⁸ Under such affliction, rather than submit to the crucifixion of one's understanding, it is easier to relieve this collision through the collapse into despair. "The alleviating aspect of despair is its unmitigated agreement that the suffering is unbearable. The strenuousness of the idea of God is to have to understand that not only is the suffering to be endured but that it is good, a gift from a God of love."¹¹⁰⁹

The suffering of the God-relationship can become apparently unbearable insofar as it appears that it is the existence of God itself that causes the suffering. "God is spirit and therefore a man (*qua* sensate being) can be involved with him only if he suffers."¹¹¹⁰ In the struggle of *Anfægtelse* one must find respite in the love of God without plunging headlong into the irremediable abyss. However, for some, the abyss yawns so wide open that relating to the absolute induces nothing but the most dreadful vertigo. Keeley describes, "At the prospect of drawing closer to God the person feels so agitated by anxiety that he is tempted to abandon his desire for a deeper relationship with God. Moreover, this anxiety is so successful in taking root that he *wants* to give up the spiritual venture and is *almost* convinced that God wants him to go back as well."¹¹¹¹ But such a person must not capitulate to the desire for despair's surrender. Under such circumstances Kierkegaard advocates that one clings to God in faith, no matter how dreadful this may seem.

Does only the person who has a gracious God and Father have a God and Father?
I wonder if the person who has, alas, an angry God and Father does not also have
a God and Father? O, my friend, if this is your predicament, or if you have been
spiritually tried [*i Anfægtelse*] in this way, continue to cling to this radical consolation;
only do not let go of God, and you will find that there is help in this. The one danger

¹¹⁰⁵ JP 4:4375 / Pap. X¹ A 478

¹¹⁰⁶ FT, 25

¹¹⁰⁷ Dermot Cox, *Man's Anger and God's Silence: The Book of Job*, 11

¹¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹⁰ JP 4:4681 / Pap. X⁴ A 481

¹¹¹¹ Keeley, 'Spiritual Trial in the Thought of Kierkegaard', 316

is to let go of God. Even if his wrath were to hang over you all your life, this still is not nearly so dangerous.

But no doubt a man is seldom spiritually tried as this.¹¹¹²

While one feels the desolation of God-forsakenness, one must not lose sight of the consolation that, despite the apparent absence, God never abandons us. Only Christ knows what this God-forsakenness means: “surely no human being has experienced that spiritual trial, the spiritual trial of being abandoned by God – but he was tempted in that way.”¹¹¹³ It is in actuality a question of one’s forsaking God in despair.¹¹¹⁴ One must not let go of, abandon or forsake God, despite the seduction of despair’s apparent alleviation of the tension of the God-relation. Anti Climacus describes a person who, after enduring the greatest horror, wills to collapse into such an irresolvable despair. “At this point, then, salvation is, humanly speaking, utterly impossible”.¹¹¹⁵ But this capitulation into the despair over possibility is also an alleviating surrender which abandons God; “but for God everything is possible! This is the battle of *faith*, battling, madly, if you will, for possibility, because possibility is the only salvation.”¹¹¹⁶ Salvation, *humanly speaking*, is an impossibility, and despair consolidates itself by collapsing into that thought. But faith has the “antidote for despair – possibility – because for God everything is possible at every moment.”¹¹¹⁷ And so the only true resolution is found in the crucifying embrace of this absurdity in which faith throws itself on God: “O, but the height of blessedness is to agree unconditionally that God is right precisely when, humanly speaking, there seems to be a case against him.”¹¹¹⁸ In the words of Anti-Climacus, “to believe is indeed to lose the understanding in order to gain God.”¹¹¹⁹

The risk is, however, that the single individual’s God-relationship can become diseased, and this is itself a dreadful spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*] as Kierkegaard sees it. At such times the God of love appears incommensurable with the sublimity of God, intensified by *Anfægtelse*, and incapable of transcending the abyss which gapes open like an infinitely uncrossable impossibility:

This kind of spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*] arises because the deep underlying feeling of infinite unworthiness basic to every true God-relationship becomes overpowering, is not transfigured into a greater joy in God, but oppresses one, so that a person becomes momentarily anxious and afraid of ideality and himself – and of God, who seems to be so infinitely sublime that one does not dare think of him at all. It seems as if he must become disgusted and tired of listening to one’s nonsense and nauseated with one’s sins.

In other words, God appears so sublimely Wholly Other that one reciprocally becomes so infinitesimally nothing that one dares not even contemplate God. Yet this *Anfægtelse*, in which one’s

¹¹¹² JP 2:1421 / Pap. X³ A 790

¹¹¹³ ‘The High Priest’, ‘Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays’, WA, 121

¹¹¹⁴ For a further examination of these themes in Kierkegaard see my ‘The Dark Night of Suffering and the Darkness of God: God-forsakenness or Forsaking God in “The Gospel of Sufferings”’, ed. Robert Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (Mercer University Press, forthcoming 2005)

¹¹¹⁵ SUD, 38

¹¹¹⁶ SUD, 38

¹¹¹⁷ SUD, 39-40

¹¹¹⁸ JP 2:1421 / Pap. X³ A 790

¹¹¹⁹ SUD, 38

sense of “infinite unworthiness” recommends that one abandons the thought of God, must be fought against in the faith and prayer that God is love.

But a person is not to give in; he is to fight against it, thank God that God has *commanded* that one *ought* to pray to him, for otherwise it is hardly possible to force one’s way through the spiritual trial. He is to remember that God is love, the God of patience and consolation, and that God is not one who adopts vain titles but is completely different from anything I am able to comprehend of what he says himself to be.¹¹²⁰

The emphasis is upon God’s *command* that one *ought* to pray. Here one recalls Luther’s words of comfort that God “promised to hear us, yes, he commanded us to pray, for the very reason that we might know and firmly believe that our petition will be heard.”¹¹²¹ Here God’s ‘Wholly Otherness’ is encountered from the opposite side of the abyss: the God Who seemed too “infinitely sublime” to contemplate, now appears as the God of love, and in being revealed as love, God is “*completely different from anything I am able to comprehend of what he says himself to be*” [my emphasis]. The ‘Wholly Other’ reveals itself to be the ‘*Holy Other*’: incomprehensible not solely in the *tremendum* of infinite sublimity, but in the *mysterium* of love – the fathomless revelation of forgiveness that is itself an awe-inspiring revelation of holiness. “That God will forgive my sin unconditionally is the most improbable of all possibilities. Therefore, it is in the confrontation by this God, and here only that I feel the proper awe... This humbles me as nothing else can. Here alone is true awe before God.”¹¹²²

In response to the *mysterium* of the impossibility of forgiveness Anti-Climacus advocates prayer. So one must fight against spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*], like Christ at Gethsemane, with the prayer which signifies the faith in divine possibility over human impossibility, thereby resisting despair. The fatalist’s collapse into despair is, according to Anti Climacus, “a mute capitulation: he is unable to pray.”¹¹²³ The fatalist is unable to pray because there is for him no air of possibility in which to breathe a word, only despair. He has lost God and his self; but “For prayer there must be a God, a self – and possibility – or a self and possibility in a pregnant sense, because the being of God means that everything is possible, or that everything is possible means the being of God”.¹¹²⁴ To pray is to break the silence of despair [*Indesluttedhed*] in order to struggle against human impossibility in the name of divine possibility. Christ alone has suffered “the last trial” of God-forsakenness and therefore God knows what it means to be abandoned by God. “Therefore, you who are tempted, whoever you are, do not become silent in despair, as if the temptation were suprahuman and no one could understand it.”¹¹²⁵

And so it begins to become apparent how the mortifying infinite qualitative abyss is transcended. But this is an infinite qualitative difference which imposes itself upon language, upon the act of speaking with God. “God is in heaven and the human being is on earth and therefore they can hardly converse... only in much fear and trembling is a human being able to speak with God, in much fear and

¹¹²⁰ JP 2:2008 / Pap. IX A 316

¹¹²¹ ‘Comfort When Facing Grave Temptations’, *Luther’s Works*, volume 42, 186

¹¹²² Heineken, *The Moment Before God*, 149

¹¹²³ SUD, 40

¹¹²⁴ SUD, 40

¹¹²⁵ ‘The High Priest’, ‘Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays’, WA, 121

trembling.”¹¹²⁶ And so, just as to see God is to die, to speak is to tremble before God. In which case, is not prayer itself a fearful task? Who could venture the prayer that might alleviate this dreadful *Anfægtelse*? “[J]ust as anxiety makes the voice fail physically, so also much fear and trembling make speech fall into silence.”¹¹²⁷ So is prayer defeated by the chasmic distance, the infinite sublimity, of that which it would speak to? For Kierkegaard “just as the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom [Proverbs 9:10], so silence is the beginning of the fear of God.”¹¹²⁸ And so in praying one falls silent because there is nothing which one can say – a silence that is qualitatively different from the silence of despair [*Indeslutthed*].¹¹²⁹ Instead one listens and learns that, far from being irremediably and oppressively infinitely sublime, God is “*completely different from anything I am able to comprehend of what he says himself to be*”. And this silence of faith’s prayer is a silence of unknowing.

It is continually tempting to speak to God in despair over salvation, as if one understood the chasmic difference – and consequently God’s holiness – better even than God in heaven. But this despair once again asserts a chasmic distance. As Anti-Climacus puts it:

When the sinner despairs of the forgiveness of sins, it is almost as if he walked right up to God and said, ‘No, there is no forgiveness of sins, it is impossible,’ and it looks like close combat. Yet to be able to do this and for it to be heard, a person must become qualitatively distanced from God, and in order to fight *cominus* [in close combat] he must be *eminus* [at a distance]... In order that the ‘No,’ which in a way wants to grapple with God, can be heard, a person must get as far away from God as possible. The most offensive forwardness is at the greatest distance...¹¹³⁰

If this offensive and combative speech is contrasted with the surrendering intimacy of prayer, it is discovered that, unlike the despair which wants to grapple with God but only does so by becoming qualitatively distanced, prayer is actually a silent waiting upon God. “And so it is; to pray is not to listen to oneself speak but is to become silent and to remain silent, to wait until the one praying hears God.”¹¹³¹ Prayer is both the speech which breaks the silence of despair [*Indeslutthed*] in the face of human impossibility and also the silence which listens to God when despair would pronounce its offence. The silence of prayer for Kierkegaard fulfills that which de Lubac looks for in “a purer submission”; it does not struggle at a distance with God in its despairing accusations but rather it transcends, as it were, the infinite difference by its submission to faith:

[P]rayer is the weapon not of one who attacks another or of one who defends himself but of one who yields... when there is no praying, God is in heaven and man is on earth, and consequently the distance is too great; but when there is praying, they are indeed too close to each other, then there is no inbetween that can be marked out as the battleground.¹¹³²

¹¹²⁶ ‘Look at the Birds of the Air; Look at the Lily in the Field’, WA, 11

¹¹²⁷ ‘Look at the Birds of the Air; Look at the Lily in the Field’, WA, 11

¹¹²⁸ ‘Look at the Birds of the Air; Look at the Lily in the Field’, WA, 11

¹¹²⁹ See Ettore Rocca, ‘Søren Kierkegaard on Silence’, ed. Houe, Marino and Rossel, *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*, 80

¹¹³⁰ SUD, 114

¹¹³¹ ‘Look at the Birds of the Air; Look at the Lily in the Field’, WA, 12

¹¹³² “[I]f a person yields himself completely in prayer, he does not struggle”. ‘One Who Prays Aright Struggles in Prayer and is Victorious – in that God is Victorious’, EUD, 383. “The more one comes to realize the difficulty of prayer, the more one realizes that in a sense the only real prayer is that one might be enabled to pray; then prayer becomes a silent surrendering of everything to God.” Perry LeFevre, *The Prayers of Kierkegaard*, 202

Prayer is thus the surrendering intimacy that overcomes the infinite abyss which has served as the battlefield between God and humanity. Perhaps more intimate than Jacob and the stranger, prayer is the struggle which is the cessation of all struggle with God. "How numerous the struggles are, how varied the struggle in which the one who prays tries himself *with* God (since someone who tries himself *against* God does not struggle in prayer)."¹¹³³ Prayer is the struggle of faith, not despair, in which the abyss [*Afgrund*] is transcended by the ground [*grund*] on which one comes to stand *before God*.

¹¹³³ EUD, 387

Chapter Six: The Gaze of the Abyss

[O]ne must never avoid questions, as one must not turn one's gaze away from the abyss.¹¹³⁴

The Optical Motif

The self's relation to God is to some extent determined by the space that exists between them. The endeavour of faith is to stand before the Face of God in the face of an abyss. One stands before God but also far away, as in Kierkegaard's discourse on the tax collector who went into the temple to pray: 'And the tax collector stood far off and would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast and said: God, be merciful to me, a sinner! (Luke 18:13)'. "The tax collector *stood far off*. What does that mean? It means to stand by yourself, alone with yourself before God – then you are far off, far away from people, and far away from God, with whom you are still alone."¹¹³⁵

The tax collector is alone before God and still a distance exists between them: a distance postulated by the consciousness of sin. "What is further away from guilt and sin than God's holiness – and then, oneself a sinner, to be alone with this holiness: is this not being infinitely far off?"¹¹³⁶ And this infinite distance disturbs the gaze of the sinner as if it were gazing into the anxious and vertiginous abyss. In this distance, the consciousness of sin asserts not the hidden Face of God, but the dizzily averted gaze of the sinner:

*And he would not even lift up his eyes to heaven; that is, he cast his eyes down. Well, no wonder! Even physically there is something in the infinite that overwhelms a person since there is nothing on which he can fix his eyes. This effect is called dizziness; then one must shut one's eyes. And the one who, alone with his guilt and his sin, knows that if he opens his eyes he will see God's holiness and nothing else, that one surely learns to cast his eyes down; or he perhaps looked up and saw God's holiness – and cast his eyes down. He looked down, saw his wretchedness; and more heavily than sleep weighs on the eyelids of the exhausted, more heavily than the sleep of death, the conception of God's holiness weighed his eyes down; like one exhausted, indeed, like one dying, he was unable to lift up his eyes.*¹¹³⁷

To see God is to die. The same opposition of the sublime burden of holiness upon the eyes of the sinner is arrayed in all its horror in Kierkegaard's following discourse on 'The Woman Who Was a Sinner'.

Here the disclosure of holiness threatens to annihilate the sinner through illumination:

For example, when one is a sinner, man or woman, to come near to the Holy One, to become disclosed before him, that is, in the light of holiness. Ah, the night does not flee more terror-stricken before the day, which wants to annihilate it, and if there are ghosts, an apparition is not more anxiously startled when day is dawning than the sinner who shrinks from the holiness that, like the day, discloses everything.¹¹³⁸

¹¹³⁴ Elie Wiesel, 'Rebbe Barukh of Medzebozh', *Four Hasidic Masters and Their Struggle against Melancholy*, 59

¹¹³⁵ 'The Tax Collector', 'Three Discourses at the Communion on Friday', WA, 128 [according to Kierkegaard "related to the last pseudonym, Anti-Climacus" (JP 6:6515 / Pap X 2 A 126) or "parallel to Anti-Climacus" (JP 6:6519 / Pap X 2 A 148)]

¹¹³⁶ WA, 129

¹¹³⁷ WA, 130

¹¹³⁸ 'Three Discourses at the Communion on Friday', WA, 137

And yet the woman who was a sinner was able, in her contrition, to anoint the feet of the Holy One with her tears; ‘her many sins are forgiven her, because she loved much’ (Luke 7:47). Likewise the humility of the tax collector that dares not look upon holiness is, ironically, the gaze that beholds God. “He cast his eyes down, but the downcast gaze *sees* God, and the downcast gaze is the *uplifting* of the heart.”¹¹³⁹ This is the gaze of faith; a gaze which “humanly speaking, is blind” in contrast to the ‘clear-sightedness’ of reason.¹¹⁴⁰ It is the presumptuous Pharisee, who like Moses presumes to look upon God, who is not permitted to see God. It is he, in presumption against the infinite difference between sin and divinity, whose gaze is occluded by the forbidding nemesis of holiness: “the Pharisee, who began by proudly lifting up his eyes to heaven, him God opposes, and God’s opposition is an annihilating pressing down.”¹¹⁴¹

It is in relation to the downcast gaze that the Holy One does not annihilate that which is unholy, that which is infinitely different. Recalling Kierkegaard’s ‘SUBDIVISIO’, with which this thesis began: “If the *Divisio* [the infinite, radical, qualitative difference] is everything, then God is so infinitely sublime [*uendelig ophøiet*] that there is no intrinsic or actual relationship between God and the individual human being.”¹¹⁴² Here the sublime [*ophøiet*] contains a suggestion of the gaze – the eye [*øie*] – that is overwhelmed by the perception of God’s *majestas* and its own nothingness. The gaze itself is engulfed by the infinite qualitative abyss that it beholds. To be grasped by this one may return to Isaiah 6 where even the angels cover their eyes before God. No one can see God and live. This is the divine vanishing point for the *mysterium tremendum* and the infinite qualitative difference. Can no eye, without averting or covering its gaze, behold the Holy One?

From the beginning the optical has haunted this entire discussion. Wrestling with the nocturnal shapes of anxiety, melancholy, and *Anfechtung* it may be aptly said that the gaze of God is such that, in Luther’s words, “there is no corner or hole in the whole of creation into which a man might creep, not even in hell, but he must let himself be exposed to the gaze of the whole creation.” ‘To see God is to die’; or else according to Nietzsche’s inversion, “The god who saw everything, *even man* – this god had to die!”: the either/or of the struggle for recognition. There is abundant reason for suggesting that such visualisations intolerably evoke the maddening horror of the *mysterium horrendum*. “That a sparrow can live is comprehensible; it does not know that it exists before God. But to know that one exists before God, and then not instantly go mad or sink into nothingness!”¹¹⁴³ This intoxication can signify a troubling *delirium tremens*: an anxious inebriation by the fantastic thought of standing before God. And yet, as well as capturing the abyssal anxiety of the endeavour to stand before the Wholly Other, the optical remains as the motif which aptly expresses the dialectic of the self authentically becoming itself before God. According to “the *autopsy* [Greek: *autos* – self; *optos* – seen] of faith”, one can only truly know oneself, as it were, before “the mirror of the Word... To stand before the mirror

¹¹³⁹ WA, 132

¹¹⁴⁰ WA, 132

¹¹⁴¹ WA, 132

¹¹⁴² JP 2:1383 / Pap. X¹ A 59

¹¹⁴³ SUD, 32

means to stand before God.”¹¹⁴⁴ It is only *post mortem* that autopsy is performed, and so it is that one must die to oneself in the autopsy of faith. “It is well known that men are afraid to see themselves physically, that superstition thought that to see oneself was an omen of death”, Kierkegaard explains, “And so it is spiritually: to see yourself is to die, to die to all illusions and all hypocrisy – it takes great courage to dare look at yourself – something which can only take place in the mirror of the Word.”¹¹⁴⁵

Kierkegaard ultimately describes a standing before the gaze of God which does not sink into madness or nothingness; there is a gaze of faith which sees God without annihilation – and its enigma resides in its unwillingness to gaze upon holiness. Instead it is as if it directs its gaze, in humility, towards the infinite qualitative abyss. The irony of the tax collector is that by casting his eyes down he sees God; by “standing far off” he stands before God. How then is this Kierkegaardian situating of the self *before God* described as other than continually guarding against the annihilation which constitutes its persistent danger? How, in other words, can one gaze into, and finally beyond, the abyss?

“Faith is: that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself rests transparently in God.”¹¹⁴⁶ Here is the optical crux: faith is related to clear-sightedness, transparency. The self before God is determined in relation to the consciousness of sin (the infinite chasmic abyss); and also by how the self sees itself in relation to the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins (the reparation of the infinite chasmic abyss). It is how the abyss is viewed which is decisive in how the self stands before God. In other words, the infinite qualitative difference is sin, and sin is despair; so one might say that despair is the gaze of the abyss, or the gaze into the abyss – for, according to Vigilius Haufniensis’s much noted observation, it is as much in the eye as in the abyss.¹¹⁴⁷ The nature of the self’s despair before God can be read in terms of how the self gazes into, and is penetrated by, the abyss of sin.

Before God: Optical Illusions

Insofar as the gaze is under discussion, the role of imagination emerges once more. Indeed, as the *delirium tremens* of the *mysterium horrendum* testifies, imagination orients the self’s intoxicated perception of its standing before God. Nevertheless, while imagination has here become *fantastic*, imagination itself retains a critical existential role in subjectivity’s devotion to a life-transforming relation – though it is not without danger of the extremities of scrupulosity or madness. Kierkegaard’s journals illustrate this through an enchanting parable on the eye of imagination. This entry from 1844 tells of a man who, spying a drowning animal through his field glasses, wades decisively into the water to its rescue. Upon discovering that he has rescued something “no bigger than a lady bug” he is subjected to the derision of the on-looking crowd and subsequently arrested. “The error”, Kierkegaard explains, “does not lie in their not being able to understand his compassion (there is no question of this at all) but in their inability to perceive that a trifling little thing, through the power of a man’s imagination etc., can come to occupy him *absolutely*.”¹¹⁴⁸

¹¹⁴⁴ JP 4:3902 / Pap. X4 A 412

¹¹⁴⁵ JP 4:3902 / Pap. X4 A 412

¹¹⁴⁶ SUD, 82

¹¹⁴⁷ CA, 61

¹¹⁴⁸ JP 2:1827 / Pap. V A 24

The lesson of an absolute relation is clear – though living ‘before God’ is no “trifling little thing”. Kierkegaard’s encompassing existential category ‘before God’ inevitably recalls the Lutheran tradition of *coram deo* (as distinct from *coram hominibus*): before the face/presence [*panîm*] of God. It should be remembered that ‘face’ in Greek [*prosopon*] as in Hebrew [*panîm*] also denotes ‘presence’. The Danish word *for* [‘before’], Eller notes, “can mean ‘for the sake of’ as well as ‘in the sight of,’ and undoubtedly both meanings were part of S.K.’s intention.”¹¹⁴⁹ When it comes to standing before God, or “with the conception of God [*Forestillingen om Gud*]”,¹¹⁵⁰ M. Jamie Ferreira moreover suggests that “the Danish word *Forestilling* resonates with nuances of imaginative activity.”¹¹⁵¹ While the English word ‘conception’ “has connotations of abstraction associated with the notions of thought or idea or concept”, Ferreira maintains that the word *Forestilling* “calls to mind a very concrete apprehension, and the imaginative engagement appropriate to a performance or introduction”.¹¹⁵² But Ferreira is not claiming that imagination functions freely via Romanticism’s expressionistic creation *ex nihilo*; rather that “in my *Forestilling* of God, I am thereby placed before God; in a presentation of God, I am confronted by God.”¹¹⁵³ Perhaps this sense of performance, introduction or presentation is to some extent also present in Kierkegaard’s analogy of the actor in the theatre for whom God is “the critical spectator”: “he is, if I may put it this way, the actor, who in the true sense is acting before God.”¹¹⁵⁴ The self is not concerned with ‘the crowd’ as spectator of the absolute relation. Moreover, George Pattison points out, “this is not so much a matter of direct experience (as if we might, one day, *feel* the eyes of God boring through us), but of a critical self-relation in which we actively adopt and take upon ourselves a certain understanding of life, a matter of actively and deliberately sustaining a certain kind of awareness, of learning to take note of how our thoughts might be bearing witness against us.”¹¹⁵⁵ It is, importantly, the subject’s free choice to see itself in this way.¹¹⁵⁶

Furthermore, Pattison elsewhere suggests that the Kierkegaardian concept ‘before God’ might be read as a Kantian “regulative concept” rather than a constitutive or experientialist foundation upon which metaphysical and ontological claims can be established.¹¹⁵⁷ The implication for such a reading would be that “although believers are to understand their lives ‘as if’ lived ‘before God’ they are not obliged to make any claims as to the actual existence or non-existence of God.”¹¹⁵⁸ This inevitably incites questions about the ontological and objective reality of God as Wholly Other. Is Kierkegaard here vulnerable to the unavoidable claim that “God is not something external. Hence, to stand alone before the face of God is not to stand before something external”?¹¹⁵⁹ Jerome Gellman supports this claim by reference to Anti-Climacus’s assertion that “God is not some externality in the sense that a

¹¹⁴⁹ *Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship*, 109

¹¹⁵⁰ SUD, 77

¹¹⁵¹ ‘Imagination and the Despair of Sin’, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1997*, 24

¹¹⁵² ‘Imagination and the Despair of Sin’, 24

¹¹⁵³ ‘Imagination and the Despair of Sin’, 25

¹¹⁵⁴ ‘On the Occasion of a Confession’, UDVS, 125

¹¹⁵⁵ *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses*, 96

¹¹⁵⁶ *Kierkegaard’s Upbuilding Discourses*, 95

¹¹⁵⁷ ‘Before God’ as a Regulative Concept’, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1997*, pp.70-84

¹¹⁵⁸ ‘Before God’ as a Regulative Concept’, 72

¹¹⁵⁹ Jerome I. Gellman, *Abraham! Abraham! Kierkegaard and the Hasidim on the Binding of Isaac*, 37. See also Gellman’s equally fascinating *The Fear, The Trembling, and the Fire*, 14.

policeman is.”¹¹⁶⁰ However, Gellman draws insufficient attention to Anti-Climacus’s contextual discussion of sin: “The error [of older dogmatics] consisted in considering God as some externality and in seeming to assume that only occasionally did one sin against God. But God is not some externality in the sense that a policeman is.”¹¹⁶¹ In other words, God should not be conceived as the judicial externality that one can escape, nor as the omnipresent voyeur who peeks down upon the sinner from his heavenly window. “With his glance”, Kierkegaard explains, God “guides the whole world and educates these countless human beings. For what is conscience? In the conscience it is God who looks upon a human being so that the human being now must look to him in all things.”¹¹⁶² God is in our hearts, one might say, therefore “every sin is before God, or, more correctly, what really makes human guilt into sin is that the guilty one has the consciousness of existing before God [though not as an externality].”¹¹⁶³ But the glance of God does not forbid the gaze but actually encourages the human being to look to God in reciprocity. Hence one may, as the tax collector, ‘stand far off’ with downcast gaze – beholding the infinite difference in humility – and yet still stand *before God*.

Before God: The Gaze of Despair

Alas, it is terrible to see a person rushing headlong to his own downfall; it is terrible to see him dancing on the edge of the abyss without suspecting it; but this clarity about himself and his own downfall is even more terrible.¹¹⁶⁴

While freedom is at the existential heartbeat of standing ‘before God’, it is a freedom which discovers itself in ‘looking to God in all things’. There is a discernible differentiation in Kierkegaard’s writings between an authentic and an inauthentic conception of God and the sense of the infinite qualitative difference between humanity and God is decisive in this. The deluded intoxication of “the fantasized religious person” has been much observed, but Anti-Climacus also notes that which he deems “poet-existence”: an existence guilty of “the sin of poeticizing instead of being, of relating to the good and the true through the imagination instead of being that – that is existentially striving to be that.”¹¹⁶⁵ Such a person is characterised by the tendency “to poeticize God as somewhat different from what God is, a bit more like the fond father who indulges his child’s every wish far too much.”¹¹⁶⁶

Nevertheless, some conception of God is present for poet-existence, albeit one rather unlike the absolutely other of Climacean literature. As such, the self is in some measure before God. Every creature surely exists as visible to the omniscient gaze of God; but becoming a self ‘before God’ freely

¹¹⁶⁰ SUD, 80

¹¹⁶¹ SUD, 80. A similar decontextualisation is apparent in Gellman’s subsequent existential claim that “To stand alone before the face of God is to be measured by total possibility, by freedom to choose oneself, independently of and outside of the imposition of any embodiment of morality.” *Abraham! Abraham!*, 37 Gellman’s supporting citation from Anti-Climacus – encompassing the line “for God is that all things are possible, and that all things are possible is God” (SUD, 40) – likewise neglects the surrounding discussion of despair’s battle for possibility as salvation in favour of a more secularised existential reading.

¹¹⁶² WL, 346

¹¹⁶³ SUD, 80

¹¹⁶⁴ UDVS, 33

¹¹⁶⁵ SUD, 77. Kierkegaard identifies himself as “the religious poet” whom Anti-Climacus refers to. See JP 6:6437 / Pap. X¹ A 525.

¹¹⁶⁶ SUD, 78

involves an existential choice in how God is conceived, or received. For the self to truly become the self it is destined to become, God is not to be imagined as merely the indulgent father, or the occasionally externalised policeman, since “the greater the conception of God, the more self there is; the more self, the greater conception of God.”¹¹⁶⁷ This self before God is qualitatively contrasted to “the human self, or the self whose criterion is man.”¹¹⁶⁸ Any self therefore becomes itself in relation to that which it stands *before*: “A cattleman who (if this were possible) is a self directly before his cattle is a very low self, and, similarly, a master who is a self directly before his slaves is actually no self – for in both cases a criterion is lacking.”¹¹⁶⁹

This latter illustration cannot but implicate Hegel’s ‘Master-Slave’ dialectic and its depiction of the mutual struggle for self-recognition.¹¹⁷⁰ It also recalls Anti-Climacus’s anatomisation of “In Despair to will to Be Oneself: Defiance”. However, in Climacus’s examination, it is not so much against the other that the self struggles to be itself; instead it is decisively over itself that it wishes to become the master. In the despair to will to be oneself the self defiantly wills to be “the infinite self”:

...the most abstract form, the most abstract possibility of the self... severing the self from any relation to a power that has established it, or severing it from the idea that there is such an idea. With the help of this infinite form, the self in despair wants to be master of itself or to create itself... in order to fashion out of it a self such as he wants, produced with the help of the infinite form of the negative self – and in this way he wills to be himself.¹¹⁷¹

While the terminology recalls Hegel, however, such a Promethean self is in defiance not only of an establishing power such as God, but also of any relation to the human other by which it may be defined. This self wills to become itself *ex nihilo*: starting “not at and with the beginning, but ‘in the beginning’.”¹¹⁷² The self, “satisfied with paying attention to itself”,¹¹⁷³ forsakes the gaze of the human and divine other in deference to the reflected introversion of Narcissistic self-regard. It seeks to transmute itself by the creative act of its self-reflection. Here again can be read an anatomisation of the decomposition of the modern self and its ill-fated struggle for self-creating self-authentication:

The self is its own master, absolutely its own master; and precisely this is the despair, but also what it regards as its pleasure and its delight. On closer examination, however, it is easy to see that this absolute ruler is a king without a country, actually ruling over nothing; his position, his sovereignty, is subordinate to the dialectic that rebellion is legitimate at any moment.¹¹⁷⁴

This diagnosis of self-consciousness determined through the mastery of the self by the infinite self could again sound rather Hegelian – except in the severance of this self from the other, the relational

¹¹⁶⁷ SUD, 80

¹¹⁶⁸ SUD, 79

¹¹⁶⁹ SUD, 79

¹¹⁷⁰ “The [Hegelian] notion of recognition is the key to interpreting what Kierkegaard means by the levels of consciousness before God.” Jon Stewart, ‘Kierkegaard’s Phenomenology of Despair in *The Sickness Unto Death*’, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 1997, 131. Also Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relation to Hegel Reconsidered*, 585

¹¹⁷¹ SUD, 68

¹¹⁷² SUD, 68

¹¹⁷³ SUD, 69

¹¹⁷⁴ SUD, 69

dialectic is internalised.¹¹⁷⁵ In the realisation that the master is “a king without a country” it becomes evident that the slave – the self that the infinite self believes it has mastered – will reappear in the failure of the self to actualise the self that it imagines. In the failure to create itself *for itself*, the finite self (“a self acted upon”) inevitably undermines the ambition and sovereignty of the infinite self (“the acting self”) – an unsustainable sovereignty “subordinate to the dialectic that rebellion is legitimate at any moment.” The self, willing in despair to be itself, transpires as an impenetrable and ungovernable abyss – equally as opaque and fluid as the ocean.

Consequently, the self in despair is always building only castles in the air, is only shadowboxing... in the final analysis, what it understands by itself is a riddle; in the very moment when it seems that the self is closest to having the building completed, it can arbitrarily dissolve the whole thing into nothing.¹¹⁷⁶

This self-examination, which fails to fathom what Kant appropriately calls “the scarcely penetrable abysses of the human heart”,¹¹⁷⁷ is built upon the optical illusion of self-mastery. It cannot reconcile itself as its own master since it is essentially master over nothingness – an abyss [*Afgrund*]. And so it is this abyss which itself becomes the master. The despairing “person is freely in the power of an alien force, is freely or in freedom slaving under it, or he is freely-unfreely in his own power”, as Kierkegaard sketches in the final draft of *The Sickness Unto Death*. “If one calls the alien force the master, then the person in despair is free in self-inflicted slavery for this master... he consequently slaves for himself, is his own slave.”¹¹⁷⁸ The internalised dialectic of master (acting self)-slave (self acted upon) has created a self estranged from itself and from its freedom by its efforts to authenticate itself. This is actually further reminiscent of Hegel: “the duplication which formerly was divided between two individuals, the lord and the bondsman, is now lodged in one... the *Unhappy Consciousness* is the consciousness of self as a dual-natured, merely contradictory being.”¹¹⁷⁹

Such alienated ‘unhappiness’ is inextricable from the self’s undermining of itself – or, more specifically, the inversion of the mastery of the infinite creating self over the finite self. The ‘acting self’ becomes ‘the self acted upon’ due to an inherent defect within the self:

Perhaps such an imaginatively constructing self, which in despair wills to be itself, encounters some difficulty or other while provisionally orienting itself to its concrete self, something the Christian would call a cross, a basic defect, whatever it may be. The negative self, the infinite form of the self, will perhaps reject this completely, pretend that it does not exist, will have nothing to do with it. But it does not succeed; its proficiency in imaginary constructing does not stretch that far, and not even its proficiency in abstracting does. In a Promethean way, the

¹¹⁷⁵ “Or is not despair [*Fortvivlelse*] actually double-mindedness [*Tvesindethed*]... everyone in despair has two wills, one that he futilely wants to follow entirely, and one that he futilely wants to get rid of entirely.” UDVS, 30

¹¹⁷⁶ SUD, 69-70

¹¹⁷⁷ *The Metaphysics of Ethics*, 248

¹¹⁷⁸ Pap. VIII² B 170:6

¹¹⁷⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ‘B. Self-Consciousness’, IV, B, 206, p. 126. Though finally omitted, Kierkegaard had drafted in *The Sickness Unto Death* (SUD, 37) that in relation to “Possibility’s Despair Is to Lack Necessity”, “Both forms [of “desiring, craving” and “the melancholy-imaginary”] are forms of an unhappy consciousness.” Pap. VIII² B 150:8. Daniel Berthold-Bond is also keen to point out that “in an important sense, Hegel also sees ‘unhappy consciousness’, or ‘soul in despair’, as the disunity of the self *before God*.” ‘Lunar Musings?’, 41

infinite, negative self feels itself nailed to this servitude. Consequently, it is a self acted upon.¹¹⁸⁰

And so the infinite creating self is internally undermined by a fatal flaw from which it is unable to abstract itself. It becomes no longer the master but the slave to this flaw which comes to signify the inability of the self to create itself. It is this flaw which undermines the Narcissistic effort to fashion, or transmute, the self into that which the infinite self imagines it to become. “What, then, are the manifestations of this despair that is: in despair to will to be oneself?”¹¹⁸¹

Such a despairing person, transfixed by this defect, is ultimately “unwilling to hope in the possibility that an earthly need, a temporal cross, can come to an end”:

He has convinced himself that this thorn in the flesh gnaws so deeply that he cannot abstract himself from it (whether this is actually the case or his passion makes it so to him), and therefore he might as well accept it forever, so to speak. He is offended by it, or, more correctly, he takes it as an occasion to be offended at all existence... in spite of or in defiance of all existence, he wills to be himself with it, takes it along, almost flouting his agony. Hope in the possibility of help, especially by virtue of the absurd, that for God everything is possible – no, that he does not want... Rather than to seek help, he prefers, if necessary, to be himself with all the agonies of hell.¹¹⁸²

He is so enmeshed in his despair to will to be oneself, so mesmerised by the Narcissism of his gazing into this thorn in the flesh, that he cannot endure the “giving up being himself” involved in submitting to “the ‘Helper’ for whom all things are possible.”¹¹⁸³ As such, he now feels that he is only authentically himself insofar as he is fixated by his defect. It is this thorn in the flesh that has become his melancholic philosopher’s stone – the secret transforming principle of his Narcissistic transmutation. This defect which refused to conform the concrete self to the creativity of the infinite self becomes the object of his infinite passion. It is by this cross alone that he now wills to be himself. It becomes, as it were, the mark of his authenticity and he has become ‘demonic’ in his devotion to it.

So now he makes precisely this torment the object of all his passion, and finally it becomes a demonic rage. By now, even if God in heaven and all the angels offered to help him out of it – no, he does not want that, now it is too late... now he would rather rage against everything and be the wronged victim of the whole world and of all life... This eventually becomes such a fixation that for an extremely strange reason he is afraid of eternity, afraid that it will separate him from his, demonically understood, infinite superiority over other men, his justification, demonically understood, for being what he is. – Himself is what he wills to be. He began with the infinite abstraction of the self, and now he has finally become so concrete that it would be impossible to become eternal in that sense; nevertheless, he wills in despair to be himself.¹¹⁸⁴

It would not be exact to say that this self is a self before God; but neither can it be said that this self ignored the power that has established it. In willing to be itself, the self has closed itself off from the other; in this sense it has demonically closed itself off from salvation. But the flaw, by which he becomes what he wills, is also demonically directed against the possibility of God. And so he wages war on God with a demonic enmity that surpasses defiance.

¹¹⁸⁰ SUD, 70

¹¹⁸¹ SUD, 70

¹¹⁸² SUD, 70-71

¹¹⁸³ SUD, 71

[N]ot even in defiance does it want to tear itself loose from the power that established it, but for spite wants to force itself upon it, to obtrude defiantly upon it, wants to adhere to it out of malice... Rebelling against all existence, it feels that it has obtained evidence against it, against its goodness. The person in despair believes that he himself is the evidence, and that is what he wants to be, and therefore he wants to be himself, himself in his torment, in order to protest against all existence with this torment.¹¹⁸⁵

Like Prometheus chained to his rock at the edge of the world, raging against Zeus from the periphery of existence, this self attaches itself defiantly to the injustice of his bonds. He gnaws his chains and bears them heavily.¹¹⁸⁶ The griffon consumes his liver only for him to endure its incessant rebirth. The flame of his sickness is endlessly unto death; his melancholy – which according to certain classical physiology is secreted from the liver as black bile – is eternally renewed. The insurrection of the self in despair willing to be itself in taking itself to be an icon for the injustice of the creator. “Figuratively speaking,” Anti-Climacus describes it as an error which slipped into an author’s writing and “became conscious of itself as an error... and now this error wants to mutiny against the author, out of hatred toward him, forbidding him to correct it and in maniacal defiance saying to him: No, I refuse to be erased; I will stand as a witness against you, a witness that you are a second-rate author.”¹¹⁸⁷ Anti-Climacus later observes that the demonic self is similar to the alcoholic “who keeps himself in a perpetual state of intoxication out of fear of stopping”.¹¹⁸⁸ In his intoxicated rage he is able to maintain himself by an “internal consistency”¹¹⁸⁹: a solidifying of the self through the demonic coherence of identity. As such, he may believe that there is authenticity in this ‘refusal to be erased’ and the defiant rejection of salvation. It is here that he has become himself. “Only in the continuance of sin is he himself, only in that does he live and have an impression of himself.”¹¹⁹⁰

Through witnessing the decomposition of the self through its basic defect, and through his demonic acknowledgement of sin, however, he may be seen to have actually taken a step towards turning to the eternal in order to become himself. But, in despair to will to be oneself, he has closed himself off to the other – “severing the self from any relation to a power that has established it, or severing it from the idea that there is such an idea”¹¹⁹¹ – or else he relates to it only through demonic insurrection. But this demonic rage is also a malignant severance from repentance, for repentance would mean that the self has contradicted itself, has literally turned away from itself and from its bondage to its Promethean rock. “Sin itself is severance from the good,” Anti-Climacus warns, “but despair over sin is the second severance.”¹¹⁹²

¹¹⁸⁴ SUD, 72

¹¹⁸⁵ SUD, 73-74

¹¹⁸⁶ Though in reference to *Christian* suffering Kierkegaard elsewhere admonishes how “To bite at the chain is to bear it heavily, to scorn the chain is also to bear it heavily.” UDVS, 242

¹¹⁸⁷ SUD, 74

¹¹⁸⁸ SUD, 108

¹¹⁸⁹ SUD, 108

¹¹⁹⁰ SUD, 108

¹¹⁹¹ SUD, 68

The Second Severance

And the abyss calls for another abyss.¹¹⁹³

Sin is the infinite chasmic abyss that separates the self from God; despair over sin is, venturing a potentially mystifying image, a second and more fatal abyss. Yet it is decisively not a severance that has been revealed by God, but an abyss which the self has willed of itself through *despairing* over the abyss of sin. Sin, according to Anti-Climacus, “may be termed the break with the good”; *despair over sin* is the break “with repentance.”¹¹⁹⁴ As with the demonic self-willing:

[D]espair over one’s sin indicates that sin has become or wants to be internally consistent. It wants nothing to do with the good... it closes itself up within itself, indeed, locks itself inside one more inclosure, and protects itself against every attack or pursuit of the good by despairing over sin. It is aware of having burned the bridge behind it and of thereby being inaccessible to the good and of the good being inaccessible to it, so that if in a weak moment it should itself will the good, that would still be impossible.¹¹⁹⁵

This intensified second severance “squeezes the uttermost demonic powers out of sin” by fortifying itself against forgiveness, by considering all “repentance and grace not only as empty and meaningless but also as its enemy, as something against which a defense must be made most of all”.¹¹⁹⁶ And so, burning the bridge across the abyss behind it, it bids farewell to penitence – like the fugitive Wandering Jew – and throws itself into the arms of despairing exile.

“Nevertheless,” Anti-Climacus asserts, “despair over sin is conscious particularly of its own emptiness, that it has nothing on which to live, not even an idea of its own self.”¹¹⁹⁷ Hence it must maintain itself, like the decadent, through its continual intoxication. The despair over one’s sin, in its demonic vitality, can thus be considered a form of ‘in despair to will to be oneself’. But this is a self which, in its desire to be internally consistent, loses all relation to grace and therefore to itself.¹¹⁹⁸ Such despair may resemble a melancholy brooding over sin. It may even suggest the melancholy sensitivity towards sin, that “deep nature”¹¹⁹⁹ of the *homo religiosus* who, with scrupulous self-indictment, despairs “I will never forgive myself.”¹²⁰⁰ Such self-condemnation may apparently conceal a troubled soul captured in the melancholy narrowness [*trængsel*] of the consciousness of sin, but it belies an implicit hubris towards one’s own guilt: a confidence in the potency of self-indictment and consequently self-forgiveness. This is a deceptively hubristic piety by which “the wrath within you wanted, as it were, to come to the aid of divine wrath so that the punishment might consume you”.¹²⁰¹ This brooding melancholy may betray an implicit form of ‘in despair to will to be oneself’: that is, a self-denunciation which is in reality a grasp at mastery over oneself. In a portrayal reminiscent of the

¹¹⁹² SUD, 109

¹¹⁹³ Elie Wiesel, ‘The Holy Seer of Lublin’, *Four Hasidic Masters and Their Struggle against Melancholy*, 64

¹¹⁹⁴ SUD, 109

¹¹⁹⁵ SUD, 109

¹¹⁹⁶ SUD, 109

¹¹⁹⁷ SUD, 110

¹¹⁹⁸ SUD, 110

¹¹⁹⁹ SUD, 111

¹²⁰⁰ SUD, 111

¹²⁰¹ EUD, 47

Hegelian terminology of *The Sickness unto Death*, Bonhoeffer describes this in terms of the conscience 'In Adam' when, "under the Atlas-burden of a world's creator, in the cold silence of his eternal solitude, man begins to fear himself, to shudder in alarm":

Thereupon, exalting himself to be his own final judge, he proceeds to his own indictment – which is couched in the language of conscience... The conscience and remorse of man in Adam are his final grasp at himself, the final confirmation and justification of his self-lordly, self-masterly attitude. Man makes himself the defendant and exhorts himself upward to his better self. But the cry of conscience serves only to dissemble the mute loneliness of his desolate isolation [what Kierkegaard calls 'inclosing reserve' (*Indesluttedhed*)?], it sounds without echo into the world that is governed and constructed by the self... Conscience can torture, can drive to despair, but is unable of itself to kill man, because indeed it is his final grasp at himself.¹²⁰²

This internalised gaze of the conscience 'In Adam' is otherwise oriented than the conscience 'before God' in which God "looks upon a human being so that the human being now must look to him in all things."¹²⁰³ In despairing over sin, such a self is still captured in the internalised Hegelian master-slave dialectic of the will to be oneself. One may say, as in Anti-Climacus's portrayal, "I can never forgive myself"; but one may be "even more deceptive" in alleging that "God can never forgive him for it. Alas, this is just a subterfuge."¹²⁰⁴ The same hubris of self-indictment is mutually evident. It is the error of believing that the self can itself decide what sin is and the extent of the possible reach of forgiveness. The flaw is in conflating what one can forgive oneself with what God can forgive one for: the omission of the infinite qualitative difference between human and divine forgiveness. This introspective grasp at the self is a denial of the 'offensive' truth that one "has to learn what sin is by a revelation from God."¹²⁰⁵ It is thus concealed self-willing to prescribe the parameters of forgiveness and to assert that one is beyond the reach of salvation. It is the *contritio activa* of self-willing rather than the *contritio passiva* of faith encountering Christ in the consciousness of sin. In reality, Anti-Climacus writes, "this kind of talk is exactly the opposite of the brokenhearted contrition that prays to God to forgive".¹²⁰⁶ The heart condemns itself – but God is greater than our hearts. It is the broken heart that opens its gaze to the other for forgiveness.

And yet the encounter with Christ – "a self directly before Christ"¹²⁰⁷ – is not immunised against its own forms of despair. Specifically, the 'intensified possibility before Christ' is what Anti Climacus calls "despair of the forgiveness of sins." In the context of this discussion, it may manifest itself as a form of "in despair to will to be oneself – a sinner – in such a way that there is no forgiveness."¹²⁰⁸ This takes the form of a refusal of the divine offer of reconciliation – to regard it as nothing but *impossible*. Recalling the earlier discussion in the previous chapter, "When the sinner despairs of the forgiveness of sins, it is almost as if he walked right up to God and said, 'No, there is no

¹²⁰² *Act and Being*, 157-158

¹²⁰³ WL, 346

¹²⁰⁴ SUD, 112

¹²⁰⁵ SUD, 95. 'The possibility of offense lies in this : there must be a revelation from God to teach man what sin is and how deeply it is rooted.' SUD, 96

¹²⁰⁶ SUD, 111

¹²⁰⁷ SUD, 113

¹²⁰⁸ SUD, 113

forgiveness of sins, it is impossible,’ and it looks like close combat.”¹²⁰⁹ But the self in despair has become far away – severed – from the God against whom it wishes to struggle: “the most offensive forwardness towards God is at the greatest distance.”¹²¹⁰ This despair is, once again, an expression of the most profound enmity between the self and God; and yet this enmity conceals the implicit dependence of the self upon God asserted by way of contradiction. Through this insurrection, one becomes dialectically “self-important by being the opposition.”¹²¹¹

In its still more intensified form, such despair becomes “THE SIN OF DISMISSING CHRISTIANITY *MODO PONENDO* [POSITIVELY], OF DECLARING IT TO BE UNTRUTH”. This Anti-Climacus equates with the unforgivable sin, the sin against the Holy Spirit [Matthew 12:31-32]: “Here the self is at the highest intensity of despair; it not only discards Christianity totally but makes it out to be a lie and untruth.”¹²¹² This sin against the Holy Spirit, Kierkegaard suggests elsewhere, may be the pride which cannot forgive itself, the hubris which believes that one’s sin has exhausted the possibilities of divine mercy.¹²¹³ While the despair of the forgiveness of sins may desperately deny the possibility of redemption from an apparently melancholy conviction of one’s wretchedness, in actuality this “intensification is an ascent from the defensive to the offensive... Despair of the forgiveness of sins is a definite position over against an offer of God’s mercy; sin is not solely retreat, not merely defensive action. But the sin of renouncing Christianity as untruth and a lie is offensive war.”¹²¹⁴ At its root is a form of ‘offense’ towards the claim to forgive sins, an offense towards the truth of the infinite qualitative difference that “there is one way in which man could never in all eternity come to be like God: in forgiving sins.”¹²¹⁵ It is here that offense mounts its offensive.

The Dialectic of Offense: “an invention of a mad god”

The heart of this offense – which in bitter enmity declares the forgiveness of sins to be impossible or Christianity to be untruth – is identified by Anti-Climacus as “Sin against the Holy Spirit... the positive form of being offended.”¹²¹⁶ Earlier Anti-Climacus writes that the imperative qualification “before God” contains “Christianity’s crucial criterion: *the absurd, the paradox, the possibility of offense*.”¹²¹⁷ What is truly found to be most offensive about Christianity, Anti-Climacus argues, is not eventually its gloom or rigour, but the realisation that “it is too high... Because it wants to make man into something

¹²⁰⁹ SUD, 114

¹²¹⁰ SUD, 114

¹²¹¹ SUD, 115

¹²¹² SUD, 125. As Cornelio Fabro observes, “the principle that desperation [despair] is a ‘duplicate sin,’ the radical sin, also called the sin against the Holy Spirit, is well known in Christian Spirituality” and could have been located by Kierkegaard in, among others, the work of St. Johannes Climacus. ‘The Problem of Desperation and Christian Spirituality in Kierkegaard’, ed. Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaardiana IV*, 64

¹²¹³ JP 4:4029 / Pap. X² A 429

¹²¹⁴ SUD, 125. One is reminded of the anti theism of Proudhon. Brogan recounts how “In 1847 he had replied to the ritual question asked of him when he was admitted as a Freemason. ‘What does one owe to God?’ by the startling answer ‘War’” *Proudhon*, 67

¹²¹⁵ SUD, 122

¹²¹⁶ SUD, 125

¹²¹⁷ SUD, 83

so extraordinary that he cannot grasp the thought.”¹²¹⁸ The real offense resides in the utter absurdity of God’s teaching that every individual human being, regardless of status, gender, profession, etc., “exists before God, may speak with God any time he wants to, assured of being heard by him – in short this person is invited to live on the most intimate terms with God!”¹²¹⁹ Taken at face value, “then Christianity – if we call paganism’s fiction of the gods human madness – is an invention of a mad god.”¹²²⁰ But more than that, this ‘mad god’ has been born into the world, suffered and died, and all for the sake of every single individual. “Truly, if there is anything to lose one’s mind over, this is it!”¹²²¹

Yet for this to happen the infinite chasmic abyss of sin must be overcome – an absurdity and an impossibility! How is the infinite qualitative distance between self and Wholly Other, which Kierkegaard’s writings strain to evoke with such dread, to be overcome? It has been noted how the ‘death of God’ ensues when the aggressive “servile subject tries to master the terror that absolute *alterity* provokes by negating the wholly other”.¹²²² But the terror of absolute *alterity* is always negated in the repudiation of God as wholly other. In one important way, as it happens, Christianity is itself inherently ‘guilty’ of bringing humanity and the Wholly Other into closer intimacy than either speculative Hegelianism or Feuerbachian anthropology. Indeed, “No teaching on earth has ever really brought God and man so close together as Christianity, nor can any do so, for only God himself can do that, and any human fabrication remains just a dream, a precarious delusion.”¹²²³

Kierkegaard’s writings express their own vitriolic offense towards any blurring of humanity and divinity which denies the infinite qualitative difference; and yet the (typically Kierkegaardian) irony is that the Christianity one finds in these writings is one which itself teaches that God has defied that very distance. This divine defiance is identified as being an offense to reason in the highest degree: an offense that is at the dialectical heartbeat of the struggle for faith. The Kierkegaardian offense towards Feuerbach, Hegel, paganism, Christendom etc., is an offense directed towards human denial of the infinite difference. In the face of such denial or omission, the abyss of sin requires assertion. And yet, on the other hand, the offense towards Christianity is ironically also an offense towards God’s transcendence of the infinite difference through forgiveness of sins. Paganism is offensive because it represents a human failure to recognise the abyss and therefore an implicit denial of it. Christianity is offensive initially because it directs the gaze despairingly towards the abyss; and secondly it is offensive because it is the Wholly Other who actually transcends the abyss of otherness. The offense is first that God is Wholly Other; and secondly that one may live in paradoxical intimacy ‘before God’.

And still, it must be observed, Christianity perpetually protects itself against any merging between humanity and God – “the most dreadful of all blasphemies”¹²²⁴ – by virtue of the incessant *possibility* of offense itself. “The existence of an infinite qualitative difference between God and man

¹²¹⁸ SUD, 83

¹²¹⁹ SUD, 85

¹²²⁰ SUD, 126

¹²²¹ SUD, 85

¹²²² Mark C. Taylor, *Erring*, 24

¹²²³ SUD, 117. See also PF, 36: “Presumably it could occur to a human being to poeticize himself in the likeness of the god or the god in the likeness of himself, but not to poeticize that the god poeticized himself in the likeness of a human being, for if the god gave no indication, how could it occur to a man that the blessed god could need him?”

¹²²⁴ SUD, 117

constitutes the possibility of offense, which cannot be removed.”¹²²⁵ The possibility of offense – “the guarantee whereby God protects himself against man’s coming too close”¹²²⁶ – is therefore the reminder that God has accomplished ‘the impossible’, something which requires the consent, not of human comprehension, but the consent of the will to that which is revealed by God.¹²²⁷ As such, as long as there is life there remains the danger that the abyss may induce offense – despair – whether at the depth and breadth of the abyss or at divinity’s claim to have crossed it. Hence the claim to reconcile the abyss may elicit a despairing offense more violent than the assertion of the infinite qualitative difference itself. The *possibility* of offence may thus be understood as an undeniable expression of human-divine *alterity*. For one captivated by the despair of the abyss of sin, the intimacy of God as Holy Other may actually incite greater enmity and estrangement than the alienation of the Wholly Other. Indeed, such offense at the idea that the abyss has been crossed may indicate that one at least holds some sense of the breadth of the abyss and the tension of spirit: it takes “singular spiritlessness not to be offended at the very idea that sin can be forgiven.”¹²²⁸ Therefore, it is possible that “despair over sin is dialectically understood as pointing toward faith” – something “implied in despair’s also being the first element in faith.”¹²²⁹ That is to say that, humanly speaking, a ‘true’ conception of the immensity of the abyss may legitimately cause one to think that the claim to transcend the distance is absurd, an offense to reason. Human comprehension cannot transcend this distance: “As sinner, man is separated from God by the most chasmic qualitative abyss. In turn, of course, God is separated from man by the same chasmic abyss when he forgives sins.”¹²³⁰ Here is the soul of a Kierkegaardian sense of God as Wholly Other. And here is the sense in which the infinite qualitative abyss is the grief of God as well as humanity.

The Unfathomable Grief of Divine Love

Precisely this is Christ’s grief, that ‘he cannot do otherwise’... What a rare act of love, what unfathomable grief of love, that even God cannot remove the possibility that this act of love reverses itself for a person and becomes the most extreme misery – something that in another sense God does not want to do, cannot want to do.¹²³¹

Decisively, it is Christ who, according to Johannes Climacus, suffers from “bearing the possibility of the offense of the human race when out of love [he] became its savior!”¹²³² It is the God-man whose unrequited love for humanity suffers at the offense of human reason. “There was a people who had a good understanding of the divine; this people believed that to see the god was death. – Who grasps the contradiction of this sorrow: not to disclose itself is the death of love; to disclose itself is the death of the beloved.”¹²³³ And so God, becoming human in disclosure to the beloved, elicits the sorrowful possibility of offence. To see God is to die; and yet, God becomes a servant – “look, behold the man!

¹²²⁵ SUD, 127
¹²²⁶ SUD, 125
¹²²⁷ SUD, 95
¹²²⁸ SUD, 116
¹²²⁹ SUD, 116*
¹²³⁰ SUD, 122
¹²³¹ SUD, 126
¹²³² PF, 32

[*Ecce homo!* John 19:5]”¹²³⁴ – and this look of offense becomes his own death at the hands of the beloved. This paradox is a terrifying *mysterium* to the understanding, potentially more dreadful than the numinous in its *tremendum*: “for it is indeed less terrifying to fall upon one’s face while the mountains tremble at the god’s voice [Exod. 19:16-19] than to sit with him as his equal, and yet the god’s concern is precisely to sit this way.”¹²³⁵

The incongruity of the God-man draws attention to itself as a contradiction, an offense. *Ecce homo!* Once again, it draws the gaze to itself; but a gaze which, encountering a divine mirror, is reflected back to interrogate the self – since it is the self and not God’s “unfathomable grief” that we can ultimately speak of:

There is something that makes it impossible not to look – and look, as one is looking one sees as in a mirror, one comes to see oneself, or he who is the sign of contradiction looks straight into one’s heart while one is staring into that contradiction. A contradiction placed squarely in front of a person – if one can get him to look at it – is a mirror; as he is forming a judgment, what dwells within him must be disclosed.¹²³⁶

And so the decisive question for the self before God is whether this sign of contradiction – which, like the abyss, one cannot resist gazing into though it also gazes back – induces despair or faith: “either you shall be offended or you shall believe.”¹²³⁷ This either/or which the mirror asks of us must be answered by each “the single individual” to whom it is addressed.¹²³⁸ As such, “the possibility of offence”, Kierkegaard asserts, “unconditionally makes a person first of all and qualitatively an ‘individual’.”¹²³⁹ It is not humanity in the abstract, the speculative idea, but each single individual who must gaze into the contradiction since “The category of sin is the category of individuality.”¹²⁴⁰

The divine concession of the single individual – who carries the inalienable possibility of offense, of despairing over the gaze into the abyss – illuminates the risk of atheism inherent within the struggle for faith.¹²⁴¹ It is always conceivable that the gaze of the contradiction who ‘looks straight into one’s heart’ – evoking the abyss of sin – becomes a disclosing gaze which one may strive to escape, as one wishes to flee in terror from one’s own reflection, “an omen of death”¹²⁴² for the self. This desire to escape asserts a different severance between the sinner and the consuming consciousness of sin:

¹²³³ PF, 30

¹²³⁴ PF, 33

¹²³⁵ PF, 34-35

¹²³⁶ PIC, 126-127

¹²³⁷ SUD, 122

¹²³⁸ “[I]t is not that man on his own initiative chooses to be *den Enkelte* in order to address God; rather, God first has addressed man as *den Enkelte*, and man must then get into that role if he is to hear and respond. *Den Enkelte* is first of all the character of God’s address and only then the nature of man’s response.” Eller, *Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship*, 110-111

¹²³⁹ Pap. X5 B 208

¹²⁴⁰ SUD, 119

¹²⁴¹ Attention to this undeniable possibility of offence would appear to conflict with Harvey Albert Smit’s allegation that Kierkegaard’s weakest point is that “He was convinced that if a man walked the road of existence until he stood alone before God, that man would become a Christian. But what basis was there for this conviction? Is this not an existential form of the Socratic conception that if a man knows the good, he will do it?” *Kierkegaard’s Pilgrimage of Man*, 193

¹²⁴² JP 3:3902 / Pap. X4 A 412

Would that there were a border, however narrow, if it still makes a separation between me and my sin! Would that on the other side of a chasmic abyss there were a spot, however little, where I can stand, while the consciousness of my sin must remain on this side. Would that there were a forgiveness, a forgiveness that does not increase my sense of guilt but truly takes the guilt from me, also the consciousness of it. Would that there were oblivion.¹²⁴³

The agony of incommensurability is that it is *before God* that one becomes aware that sin cannot stand before holiness. The tension of this difference is asserted as one is disclosed as a sinner before God, Anti-Climacus describes:

[W]hereby the opposites are kept together in a double sense: they are held together (*continentur*), they are not allowed to go away from each other, but by being held together in this way the differences show up all the more sharply, just as when two colors are held together, *opposita juxta se posita magis illucesunt* [the opposites appear more clearly by juxtaposition].¹²⁴⁴

Once one is before God, then, recalling the spirit of Lutheran *Anfechtung*, one flees but cannot escape the opposition which exposes the crushing contrast of infinity upon the finite. And yet, if one is conscious of oneself as a sinner then, according to Anti-Climacus in *Practice in Christianity*, God will not aggravate the tenderised conscience – “he will not break the bruised reed even more” – but rather will “raise you up when you accept him; he will not identify you by contrast, by placing you apart from himself so that your sin becomes even more terrible”.¹²⁴⁵ As such, forgiveness negates the crushing juxtaposition of the infinite difference. Perhaps it would be best to say that salvation is an end to the infinite abyssal *distinction*. While *difference* is perpetually maintained – a difference which is itself asserted in the act of forgiveness – it is the act of alienating contrast, or dreadful opposition that is overcome. Instead of the conscience restlessly fleeing its own shadow in search of an unobtainable hiding place from the light of guilt, God “will grant you a hiding place with himself, and hidden in him he will hide your sins.”¹²⁴⁶

As such, the gaze of God which discloses the eye of the beholder to itself is a gaze that neither interrogates sin with voyeuristic relish, nor annihilates that which it looks upon. It is the gaze of one who sits as one’s equal. It is a gaze which Pattison has rightly referred to as “the look of love”¹²⁴⁷ – a look one might contrast to the crucifying look of offense with which one beholds the God-man (*Ecce homo*). Kierkegaard explains:

Justice looks judgingly at a person, and the sinner cannot endure its gaze; but love, when it looks at him – yes, even if he avoids its gaze, looks down, he nevertheless does perceive that it is looking at him, because love penetrates far more inwardly into life, deep inside life, in there

¹²⁴³ ‘Love Shall Hide the Multitude of Sins’, ‘Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays’, WA, 184

¹²⁴⁴ SUD, 121-122

¹²⁴⁵ PIC, 20

¹²⁴⁶ PIC, 20

¹²⁴⁷ “The look of love with which Christ transforms our penitent love for him into an eternal image of forgiveness, is God’s own look of love.” ‘Looks of Love: The Seducer and the Christ’, paper presented at *Kierkegaardian Images of Christ*, The Annual Conference of the Søren Kierkegaard Society of the United Kingdom, University of Manchester, 8th May, 2004. I must acknowledge my particular gratitude to Prof. Pattison for providing me with a copy of his paper which, though also concerned with the counterpoint of “the spectacular city”, deals with many of the same instances of ‘the gaze’ in Kierkegaard’s writings as this chapter.

whence life emanates, than justice does, which repellingly establishes a chasmic abyss between the sinner and itself, whereas love is on his side, does not accuse, does not judge, but pardons and forgives.... Whither shall I flee from justice? If I take the wings of the morning and fly to the nearest sea, it is there. And if I hide myself in the abyss, it is there, and thus it is everywhere [Psalm 139:7-12]. Yet, no, there is one place to which I can flee – to love.¹²⁴⁸

The penitent must therefore “stop staring at his guilt” – which, recalling Vigilius Haufniensis, has the anxious allure of the serpent’s glance. The penitent must “shut his eyes” and “open the eyes of faith so that he sees purity where he saw guilt and sin!”¹²⁴⁹ The penitent then ceases to flee from himself – “the futile attempt that only leads more deeply to despair or madness” – and flees instead to Christ who will “shield me from the eyes of justice”.¹²⁵⁰

Very Lutheranly, one might say, the penitent flees from the wrath of heaven into the mercy of Christ. The eyes of justice do not see sin. But this is not the mercy of God deceptively blinding the eyes of God’s justice. It is as much a problem of the anxious gaze of guilt which will not see sin with the eyes of faith. Justice “repellingly establishes a chasmic abyss” into which one cannot lose oneself (“Would that there were oblivion”) since “if I hide myself in the abyss, it is there”; but “love is on his side” – his side of the abyss one might say. It is also from these internal eyes of guilt, temptation, and accusation that the believer is hidden in God. Haufniensis gives us some idea of the insidious and anxious gaze of one who is “a divine prosecutor... in relation to himself” for whom guilt has “the fascinating power of the serpent’s glance.”¹²⁵¹ Indeed, as Kierkegaard explains in another discourse, it is the devil’s glance of temptation – “this glittering gaze that looks as if it could penetrate earth and sea and the most hidden secrets of the heart”¹²⁵² – from which the believer is hidden in God. “He is sharp-sighted, the evil one whose snare is called temptation and whose prey is called the human soul.” And yet, “The temptation does not actually come from him”.¹²⁵³ It comes from the “ambivalence” of the human subject – in some way related to what Haufniensis might call the ambivalence of the fearful desire of the gaze of anxiety – on which the glittering gaze catches. “But the person who by unconditional obedience [without ambivalence] hides in God is unconditionally secure; from his secure hiding place he can see the devil, but the devil cannot see him.”¹²⁵⁴ Retaining the optical motif: “That a person wants to sit and brood and stare at his sin and is unwilling to have faith that it is forgiven” signifies faithlessness, according to Kierkegaard, “a minimizing of what Christ has done.”¹²⁵⁵ The gaze of melancholy reveals our great tragedy to be “that we have no real conception of what sin is in God’s eyes.”¹²⁵⁶

¹²⁴⁸ ‘But One Who Is Forgiven Little Loves Little’, ‘Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays’, WA, 172

¹²⁴⁹ ‘Love Shall Hide the Multitude of Sins’, WA, 185

¹²⁵⁰ WA, 187

¹²⁵¹ CA, 103

¹²⁵² ‘No Man Can Serve Two Masters’, ‘The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air’, WA, 33

¹²⁵³ WA, 33

¹²⁵⁴ WA, 33

¹²⁵⁵ JP 4:4036 / Pap. X² A 477

¹²⁵⁶ JP 4:4026 / Pap. X² A 400

The precarious life of sin, Kierkegaard writes, is a life which “hovers over the abyss and therefore has no foothold.”¹²⁵⁷ Anti-Climacus thus warns how the gravitation of sin “leads downward so easily...as easily as when the horse, completely relieved of pulling, cannot, not even with all its strength, stop the wagon, which now runs it into the abyss.” Here are both senses of the abyss: its depth [*Dyb*] and its groundlessness [*Afgrund*]. Reliant solely upon oneself, one cannot extract oneself from the abyss. But, Anti-Climacus counsels, one must “not despair over every relapse.”¹²⁵⁸ Once anatomised solely from guilt, the abyss is fathomed without relation to that which lies beyond its shores. The anatomisation of the distance and depth of sin – something surpassing human understanding – cannot be grasped by introspection but only by revelation: “that is what you know least of all, how far from perfect you are and what sin is.”¹²⁵⁹ As with the consciousness of sin, so must forgiveness be received from God. Luther, rebuffing the assaults upon his conscience wrought by the devil’s manipulation of Scripture, appealed to what he aptly called the “alien word”, which, as Rupp explains, “is the Gospel, which is not ‘my own,’ but which I must hear spoken ‘to me.’...a Christian can only be promised absolution, the Word of forgiveness, ‘from outside.’”¹²⁶⁰ But this ‘alien word’ is the *mysterium* [*alienum*] of forgiveness that does not offer alienation but reconciliation. As humanity can never fathom the true breadth and depth of sin, so humanity, Anti-Climacus asserts, can never know what it is for God to forgive sins. Sin is, as González describes, “that which man cannot think as a divine thought.”¹²⁶¹ Here is the “crucifixion of one’s understanding”.¹²⁶² So Otto notes how for the Psalmist, “[w]hen he gazes down into the immeasurable, yawning Depth of the divine Wisdom, dizziness comes upon him”.¹²⁶³ Here is the real vertigo of the abyss: the fathomless and inexhaustible depths of God’s grace.

Here this thesis returns to its beginning in its conclusion. The infinite difference between divinity and humanity is irreducibly “maintained as it is in the paradox and faith, so that God and man do not, even more dreadfully than ever in paganism, do not merge in some way, *philosophice, poetice*, etc., into one – in the system.”¹²⁶⁴ But, in forgiveness, this “gulf of qualitative difference between God and man”¹²⁶⁵ becomes an unfathomable abyss free from that ‘moment of death’ which is the danger inherent to the dialectics of melancholy, anxiety, *Anfægtelse*, and despair. When faith is present, the abyssal consciousness of sin – gaping open like an incurable wound – is transfigured into a gulf between human and divine forgiveness, between human impossibility and divine possibility. As the consciousness of sin cannot be truly grasped without the relational consciousness of forgiveness, so the abyss of sin cannot be anatomised without this gulf of forgiveness. The true meaning of the infinite qualitative difference is the infinite quality of mercy.

¹²⁵⁷ WL, 276

¹²⁵⁸ PIC, 19

¹²⁵⁹ SUD, 96

¹²⁶⁰ *The Righteousness of God*, 226

¹²⁶¹ Darío González, ‘Sin, Absolute Difference,’ *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 1997, 374

¹²⁶² JP 4:4375 / Pap. X¹ A 478

¹²⁶³ *The Idea of the Holy*, 186

¹²⁶⁴ SUD, 99

¹²⁶⁵ SUD, 99

‘Blessed is the one who is not offended’, therefore, since the infinite qualitative difference of divine forgiveness is the *mysterium* by which the Wholly Other arouses the *tremendum et fascinans* expressed most authentically through worship:

The person who does not take offense *worships* in faith. But to worship, which is the expression of faith, is to express that the infinite, chasmic, qualitative abyss between them is confirmed. For in faith the possibility of offense is again the dialectical factor.¹²⁶⁶

But – and here is the reminder – the *possibility* of offense can never be removed, just as the thorn in the flesh, or the wound of Jacob, remains as the self’s enduring memento. And yet the gulf of forgiveness, in maintaining this persistent risk of offense, may itself be described as the possible moment of death for the self before God, the self confronted by the abyss. The possibility of offense insures that the abyss can always gape wide and dark for the gaze which, in its darkest hour, dare not or cannot look upon God. One may become, as Kierkegaard describes in a student sermon in 1842, “crushed by the thought that you were a nothing and your soul lost in infinite space”.¹²⁶⁷ It may appear that in some way God has become nothing but the abyss itself – the infinitely forbidding difference between humanity and divinity; the holy abyss which overwhelms the eye with dizziness. But God – the Wholly Other – is not another name for the abyss. God is the Holy Other who, as it were, stands on the other side of the abyss; or rather, the Holy One who, it must be remembered, bestrides the abyss. In this thought is “Confidence before God”, despite the abyss:

It sometimes happens that our eyes turn toward heaven, and we are astonished at the infinite distance, and the eye cannot find a resting place between heaven and earth – but when the eye of the soul seeks God and we feel the infinite distance, then it is a matter of confidence – but here we have a mediator.¹²⁶⁸

In the God-relationship, therefore, “there is a holding-on place in existence, for God has hold of it” even in the abyss, and in this standing fast God relieves “the dizziness which is the beginning of mutiny.”¹²⁶⁹ The self must then choose the loving struggle of Jacob with the stranger over the rage of Prometheus’s offense against the bonds of Zeus. The self before God is a divine gift – not the fire stolen from heaven which only serves to ignite an unquenchable inner flame.

Seen with the eyes of faith, forgiveness overcomes the distance of the abyss [*Dyb*] – its vertiginous sublimity which overwhelms the eye. The self discovers the confidence to stand on the gift of holy ground [*grund*] before God in the face of the abyss [*Afgrund*]. It is in worship rather than offense that the self discovers the ground on which it stands before God – the Holy Other: an *alterity* confirmed in worship. It is the presence of God in the call ‘Abraham, Abraham’ or ‘Moses, Moses’. It is the ground given to us in which God apparently recedes in order to make room for the ‘I’ – the “infinite concession” – to stand *coram deo* in its response of ‘here I am’. It is the ground on which the ‘I’ can love God in return. It is the call of Christ to ‘come here’ given to those “whose residence has been assigned among the grave”: that is, to the one who is “not buried, yet dead... belonging neither to

¹²⁶⁶ SUD, 129

¹²⁶⁷ JP 4:3915 / Pap. III C 1

¹²⁶⁸ JP 2:1200 / Pap. II A 326

¹²⁶⁹ WL, 122

life nor to death... you, too, come here, here is rest, and here is life!”¹²⁷⁰ It is this that we are able to call forgiveness. And as worshipper – loving God in return – one becomes oneself by becoming nothing before God. And yet, whilst rejoicing in expressing the infinite difference, Kierkegaard also claims that “worship is what makes the human being resemble God... The human being and God do not resemble each other directly but inversely; only when God has infinitely become the eternal and omnipresent object of worship and the human being always a worshipper, only then do they resemble each other.”¹²⁷¹

¹²⁷⁰ PIC, 18

¹²⁷¹ UDVS, 193

Appendix: Postscript On Forgiveness and the Final Question of the Other

What has been portrayed is for some a posture of heroism: “Christian heroism – a rarity, to be sure – to venture wholly to become oneself, an individual human being, this specific human being, alone before God”.¹²⁷² For many, however, Kierkegaard depiction of the self before God irrevocably strands the individual upon a precipice, trembling over a holy abyss, forsaking ‘the others’ in its anguished struggle to relate to a Wholly Other by whom it must remain ultimately forsaken. “We, ourselves wandering on the narrow ridge, must not shrink from the sight of the jutting rock on which he stands over the abyss; nor may we step on it”, Buber warns, “We have much to learn from him, but not the final lesson.”¹²⁷³ The final lesson into whose school Buber will not submit himself is a lesson undermined by this conspicuous absence of ‘the other’. As such, Kierkegaardian inwardness, in this inscription, is consigned to become a relic of modern melancholy, a fading silhouette of an individualised ‘self’ whose contours, in the twilight of modernity, have become increasingly uncertain.

It is, Charles Taylor exhorts, ‘the ethic of authenticity’ that responds to the sense of loss which features in our characteristic “malaises of modernity”.¹²⁷⁴ But in the indeterminate agitation of the *postmodern* what becomes of that passionate modern search for ‘authenticity’ – which according to Golomb begins with a confession from Kierkegaard and threatens to be shipwrecked upon the jagged rocks of deconstruction?¹²⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the depiction of Kierkegaardian subjectivity as the icon of a definitively modern inwardness is itself becoming increasingly dubious. What is becoming clearer is that Kierkegaard can be read as transcribing the actual iconoclasm of modern selfhood in order to raise up from its ashes a self becoming itself in the openness of relating to God. To exist before God actually requires “immense passivity, vulnerability and wounded openness” which, Pattison writes, “calls for an orientation of the self that is quite alien to the mainstream of Western philosophical thought about the self and is certainly in profound tension with the post-Enlightenment pursuit of autonomy.”¹²⁷⁶ And neither does this “wounded openness” close itself to the human other. Anti-Climacus’s ‘self before God’ irredicibly demands a relation that begins in esteeming all individuals as equal before God: a valuation which, aspiring to see through the eyes of God, recognises the *alterity* of every other.

“God is not the only ‘other’ to which selves can relate and thereby become selves,” C. Stephen Evans clarifies, “though God remains the crucial ‘other’ for selfhood in the highest sense.”¹²⁷⁷ Anti-Climacus’s criteria may thereby recall Luther’s distinction between *coram deo* / *coram nobis*

¹²⁷² SUD, 5

¹²⁷³ Buber, ‘The Question to the Single One’, ed. Daniel W. Conway, *Søren Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers Volume III Philosophy of Religion*, 42

¹²⁷⁴ *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 1

¹²⁷⁵ “The search for authenticity in modern Western thought begins with the desperate journal entry, dated 1 August, 1835, of a 22-year-old Dane: ‘the thing is to find a truth, which is true *for me*, to find the idea for which I can live and die.’” *In Search of Authenticity*, 33. “There is today a grave danger that we are facing the death of authenticity. Poststructuralist thought and other currently fashionable streams of what is usually called ‘postmodernism’ attempt to dissolve the subjective pathos of authenticity which lies at the heart of existentialist concern.” *Ibid.*, 203-204

¹²⁷⁶ “‘Before God’ as a Regulative Concept”, 84

¹²⁷⁷ C. Stephen Evans, ‘Who Is the Other in *Sickness Unto Death*? God and Human Relations in the Constitution of the Self’, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 1997, 8

(*coram hominibus*).¹²⁷⁸ In Levinas, however, the ‘here I am’, in which one responds as the single individual before God, becomes the authentic primal response to the other. Admittedly Anti-Climacus does not fulfil the task which Kierkegaard feels compelled to take up elsewhere. “The desire is to exist in the eyes of the mighty”, Kierkegaard writes in *Works of Love* – and once more one might think of Hegel; but it is through the eyes of God that one learns “the relationship between man and man ought and dare never to be one in which the one worships and the other is worshipped.”¹²⁷⁹ The self before God calls for all to be equally valued as individuals before God. ‘Before God’ is, accordingly, “the source and origin of all individuality”, but to believe in one’s “authentic individuality” means concomitantly to:

...believe in the individuality of every other person; for individuality is not mine but is God’s gift by which he gives me being and gives being to all, gives being to everything. It is simply the inexhaustible swell of goodness in the goodness of God that he, the *almighty*, nevertheless gives in such a way that the receiver obtains individuality, that He who created out of nothing nevertheless creates individuality, so that creation over against him shall not be nothing, although it is taken from nothing and is nothing and yet becomes individuality.¹²⁸⁰

And so ‘before God’ one speaks not simply of the *alterity* of ‘the other’ but of the open relation to ‘the neighbour’: “The concept of *neighbour* means a duplicating of one’s own self. *Neighbour* is what philosophers would call the *other*, by which the selfishness in self-love is to be tested.”¹²⁸¹ And it is in the concept of neighbour that the notion of ‘forgiveness’ arises once more: a notion reawakening the controversies of offense and the infinite difference. Reflection upon ‘forgiveness’ and ‘the other’ provokes fastidious questions for any theological anthropology which, in asserting the primacy of the self before God and the infinite qualitative difference, one might loosely call ‘Kierkegaardian’. More precisely, it is the infinite difference of forgiveness – upon which much of the present conclusion finally rests – that potentially induces an abyss between self and other. Recalling Anti-Climacus: “there is one way in which man could never in all eternity come to be like God: in forgiving sins.”¹²⁸² And yet, Kierkegaard recognises, ‘Forgive, and you also will be forgiven’ [Matt 6:12, 14-15]: “Your forgiveness of another is your own forgiveness; the forgiveness which you give you receive, not contrariwise that you give the forgiveness that you receive.”¹²⁸³ How can these proclamations be related? Is there more to be said here than an apparent pseudonymous incongruity? Anti-Climacus, for his part, is evidently asserting that humanity can never, ontologically one might say, forgive the sins that God has forgiven; whilst Kierkegaard, in *Works of Love*, seems to be implying that there is some connection between our forgiveness by God and our forgiveness of our neighbour. “Of course we are called to forgive each other,” Sponheim writes, “but God’s forgiveness is of a wholly other order.”¹²⁸⁴ A resolution can perhaps be found in an apparently paradoxical journal entry from 1854: “To forgive sins is divine not only in the sense that no one is able to do it except God, but it is

¹²⁷⁸ See Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 161

¹²⁷⁹ WL, 128

¹²⁸⁰ WL, 253

¹²⁸¹ WL, 37

¹²⁸² SUD, 122

¹²⁸³ WL, 348

¹²⁸⁴ Sponheim, Paul, ‘Is Forgiveness Enough? A Kierkegaardian Response’, *Word and World*, Volume XVI, Number 3, Summer 1996, 322

also divine in another sense so that we must say that no one can do it without God.”¹²⁸⁵ One possible reading would be that one learns the meaning of forgiveness from God, though this understanding is only faithfully manifest in our forgiving of the other – the giving with which our receiving is concomitant. The paradox is such that only with God can one forgive, and yet it is in forgiving the other that one receives forgiveness oneself. Here the ostensible collision between infinite difference and resemblance occurs once more: “there is not a more exact agreement between the sky above and its reflection in the sea, which is just as deep as the distance is high, than there is between forgiveness and forgiving.”¹²⁸⁶

Significantly, in Kierkegaard, the question of forgiveness is never far removed from the question of offense towards the claim to forgive. This has particular pertinence to the question of suffering, since the need for forgiveness implies that someone has suffered. It is, moreover, the offense of suffering which begs the question of the relation between human and divine forgiveness – a question which returns to the earlier concern with the abyss of the Holocaust. Though this may end on a dark note, it would be important to say something about the question of the unforgivable posed by the Holocaust – an aporia confronted in the uncompromising writings of Vladimir Jankélévitch which have elicited a recent response from Derrida. “Forgiveness is impossible... ‘Forgiveness,’ says Jankélévitch, ‘died in the death camps.’”¹²⁸⁷ One cannot, indeed must not, forgive the other for the sake of the others who died and are thereby not present to grant a forgiveness that is perhaps not even sought after. Here is a forgiveness which ultimately, for Jankélévitch, may not be stronger than evil. Jankélévitch thus capitulates before an “uncrossable barrier”¹²⁸⁸ – an abyss which threatens to devour the reach of forgiveness in the wake of the *tremendum*, the monstrous [*Ungeheur*]. And impossibility of forgiveness this may be true for God – who has permitted this suffering – as much as for ‘the other’ who has wrought it.

This is effectively a controversy of offense, both against suffering and forgiveness – though clearly a controversy Kierkegaard is historically stranded from. But, despite this, could there be any point of contact between Kierkegaard and this more contemporary aporia? Recently Hugh Pyper has enticingly proposed Kierkegaard’s insights on the unforgivable into this debate: “The denial of possibility is the unforgivable.”¹²⁸⁹ This is true in more than one sense for Kierkegaard. Perhaps to deny the possibility of forgiveness is itself unforgivable: “If you cannot bear the offences of men against you, how should God be able to bear your sins against him?”¹²⁹⁰ Through not forgiving, one permits an abyss to swell between self and the other – the neighbour, through forgiving whom, one comes to resemble God. “Forgiveness as God’s possibility becomes decisive just where there is no

¹²⁸⁵ JP 2:1224 / Pap. XI² A 3

¹²⁸⁶ WL, 349

¹²⁸⁷ ‘To Forgive: The Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible’, *Questioning God*, 27

¹²⁸⁸ See Derrida, ‘To Forgive: The Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible’, 40

¹²⁸⁹ Hugh Pyper, ‘Forgiving the Unforgivable: Kierkegaard, Derrida and the Scandal of Forgiveness’, paper presented at *Kierkegaard: Between Ethics and Religion*, The 2nd International Conference of the Søren Kierkegaard Society of the United Kingdom, University of Leeds, 8th July, 2001. I am grateful to Hugh Pyper for providing me with a copy of this paper.

¹²⁹⁰ WL, 352

human possibility of forgiveness – in the face of the unforgivable.”¹²⁹¹ And yet suffering threatens to assert another abyss between human and divine forgiveness: we may never know what it means for God to forgive us; but can God know what it requires for us to forgive God? Here is an abyss of offense: offense against those who forgive; offense against God forgiving, not only oneself as Kierkegaard speaks of, but the other whom one does not forgive; even offense against God’s allowance of suffering, or against those who ‘forgive’ God.

But what would it mean to ‘forgive’ God? Kierkegaard’s infinite difference asserts that it is not ontologically possible to forgive sins as our sins are forgiven, to know what it is for God to forgive. But perhaps one could adapt another notion from Kierkegaard’s writings in order to suggest what it could mean to ‘forgive’ God in the face of apparent divine darkness – a notion which relates to Abraham’s trust in the will of God in the face of sacrifice (a faith which often seems to lurk in the shadows of all Kierkegaard’s writings). This notion of ‘forgiving’ God would be a definition of faith as the teleological suspension of offense. In other words, to ‘forgive’ God in the face of inscrutable suffering would be to ‘suspend’ offense through the longing for faith – though this teleology of the suspension of offense is one which can only be attained through the consummation of faith’s telos, something which, melancholically one might say, is only attained in eternity. And yet, as Silentio recounts, who can understand this Abrahamic leap into the absurd? Either offense or faith. Perhaps the demand is ultimately too high, *impossible* one should say. Perhaps such faith is too sublime to accomplish – perhaps even such a faith is more than God deserves – if it were not that this faith is, in its own way, the gift of God. What I find unavoidable in reading Kierkegaard is that in some sense God is the cause of offence and therefore of despair, and here in this “*horror religiosus*”¹²⁹² is found the sublimity of a faith which overcomes God through God, as it were. It is at this point that faith as the teleological suspension of offense reminds me of Simon Weil’s notion of a purifying prayer which prays to God “with the thought that God does not exist.”¹²⁹³ But these are expansive questions for which the future may offer some reconciliation. For now, let us seek some inspiration from Kierkegaard’s own sublime remark that “to love another person means to help him to love God”.¹²⁹⁴

If we love God while thinking that he does not exist, he will manifest his existence.¹²⁹⁵

But then, you will say, what is left? Is there hope despite everything, despite ourselves? Despair, perhaps? Or faith?

All that is left is the question.¹²⁹⁶

¹²⁹¹ Pyper, ‘Forgiving the Unforgivable: Kierkegaard, Derrida and the Scandal of Forgiveness’

¹²⁹² Johannes de Silentio aptly applies this phrase to describe his response to the faith of Abraham: “One approaches him with a *horror religiosus*, as Israel approached Mount Sinai.” (FT, 52). Sylvian Agacinski astutely suggests that Silentio replaces the sublimity of the creator with the sublimity of Abraham’s faith. “To say that Abraham is sublime is to say that he has become a stranger to us. We tremble before the man of faith just as he trembled before his God.” ‘We Are Not Sublime’, *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, 44.

¹²⁹³ *Gravity and Grace*, 19

¹²⁹⁴ WL, 124. I discuss some of these questions further in my ‘The Dark Night of Suffering and the Darkness of God: God-forsakenness or Forsaking God in “The Gospel of Sufferings”’, ed. Robert Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (Mercer University Press, forthcoming 2005).

¹²⁹⁵ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 15

¹²⁹⁶ Elie Wiesel, ‘To Believe or Not to Believe’, *From the Kingdom of Memory*, 35

Bibliography

Søren Kierkegaard's Works in Danish

Samlede Vaerker, 20 Volumes. København: Glydendal, 1962.

Søren Kierkegaard's Works in English

Armed Neutrality and An Open Letter, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1968.

The Concept of Anxiety, ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980.

The Concept of Irony: With Constant Reference to Socrates, trans. Lee M. Capel. London: Collins, 1966.

Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968.

Christian Discourses and The Lillies of the Field and the Birds of the Air, and Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays, trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971.

Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990.

Either/Or: A Fragment of Life, Volume One, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949

Either/Or: A Fragment of Life, Volume Two, trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949.

Fear and Trembling and The Book on Adler, trans. Walter Lowrie. London: David Campbell Publishers Ltd., 1994.

For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourselves! and Three Discourses, trans. Walter Lowrie. London: Oxford University Press, 1941.

Gospel of Sufferings, trans. A.S. Aldsworth and W.S. Ferrie. Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1982.

Journals and Papers, 7 Volumes, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1967-78.

The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard – A Selection, ed. and trans. Alexander Dru. London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1951.

Kierkegaard's Attack Upon 'Christendom', trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968.

Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985.

The Point of View For My Work as an Author, trans. Walter Lowrie. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

Practice in Christianity, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology, trans. Walter Lowrie. New

- York, Evanston and London: Harper and Row Publishers, 1964.
- The Sickness Unto Death*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong.
Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Stages on Life's Way*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong.
Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and The Present Age (A Literary Review)*, ed.
and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University
Press, 1978.
- Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, ed. trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H.
Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Without Authority*, ed. trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, New
Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Works of Love*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, New
Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Secondary Works (Kierkegaard)
- Adorno, Theodor W., *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor.
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Agacinski, Sylviane, *Aparté: Conceptions and Deaths of Søren Kierkegaard*, trans. Kevin Newmark.
Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1988.
- Agacinski, Sylviane, 'We are Not Sublime: Love and Sacrifice, Abraham and Ourselves.' In
Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader, ed. Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain. Oxford: Blackwell,
1997.
- Allen, Diogenes, *Three Outsiders: Pascal, Kierkegaard, Simone Weil*. Cambridge, Massachusetts:
Cowley Publications, 1983.
- Andic, Martin, 'The Mirror.' In *International Kierkegaard Commentary Volume 21: For Self-
Examination and Judge for Yourself!*, ed. Robert L. Perkins. Macon, Georgia: Mercer
University Press, 2002.
- Arbaugh, G. E., 'The Devil.' In *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Vol. 5: Theological Concepts in
Kierkegaard*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels
Boghandel, 1980.
- Arbaugh, George E., 'Kierkegaard and Feuerbach.' In *Kierkegaardiana XI*, ed. Niels Thulstrup.
Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1980.
- Arbaugh, George E. and Arbaugh, George B., *Kierkegaard's Authorship*, London: George Allen and
Unwin Ltd., 1968.
- Beabout, Gregory R., 'Existential Despair in Kierkegaard.' *Philosophy and Theology* (Winter 1992),
- Beabout, Gregory R., *Freedom and Its Misuses: Kierkegaard on Anxiety and Despair*. Milwaukee:
Marquette University Press, 1996.
- Beabout, Gregory R., 'Kierkegaard on the Self and Despair: An Interpretation of the Opening Passage
of *The Sickness Unto Death*.' *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical
Association* 62 (1988).

- Berthold-Bond, Daniel, 'Lunar Musings? An Investigation of Hegel and Kierkegaard's Portraits of Despair.' *Religious Studies* 34.
- Buber, Martin, 'The Question to the Single One.' In *Søren Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers Volume III Philosophy of Religion: Kierkegaard Contra Contemporary Christendom*, ed. Daniel W. Conway with K. E. Gover. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Bukdahl, Jørgen, *Søren Kierkegaard and The Common Man*, ed. and trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse. Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001.
- Butler, Judith, 'Kierkegaard's Speculative Despair.' In *The Age of German Idealism*, ed. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Caputo, John D., 'Instants and Singularities: Dealing Death in Kierkegaard and Derrida.' In *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, ed. Martin J. Matušík and Merold Westphal. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Carr, Charles, 'Kierkegaard: On Guilt.' *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 1:3 (1973).
- Crites, Stephen, *In the Twilight of Christendom: Hegel vs. Kierkegaard on Faith and History*. Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: American Academy of Religion, 1972.
- Croxhall, T. H., *Kierkegaard Commentary*. London: Nisbet, 1956.
- Deede, Kristen, 'The infinite qualitative difference: Sin, the self, and revelation in the thought of Søren Kierkegaard.' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 53:1 (February 2003).
- Dietrichson, Paul, 'Kierkegaard's Concept of the Self.' *Inquiry* 3 (1965).
- Dooley, Mark, *The Politics of Exodus: Søren Kierkegaard and the Ethics of Responsibility*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2001.
- Dunning, Stephen N., *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness: A Structural Analysis of the Theory of Stages*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Dupré, Louis, 'The Constitution of the Self in Kierkegaard's Philosophy.' *International Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (1963).
- Dupré, Louis, 'Of Time and Eternity in Kierkegaard's Concept of Anxiety.' *Faith and Philosophy* 1: 2 (1984).
- Eller, Vernard, *Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship: A New Perspective*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- Elrod, John, 'Feuerbach and Kierkegaard on the Self.' *Journal of Religion* 56 (1976).
- Elrod, John, 'The Self in Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms.' *International Journal For Philosophy of Religion* 4 (1973).
- Evans, C. Stephen, 'Kierkegaard's View of the Unconscious.' In *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, ed. Martin J. Matušík and Merold Westphal. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Evans, C. Stephen, 'Who Is the Other in *Sickness Unto Death*? God and Human Relations in the Constitution of the Self.' In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1997*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997.
- Fabro, Cornelio, 'Atheism.' In *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Vol. 5: Theological Concepts in*

- Kierkegaard, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1980.
- Fabro, Cornelio, 'Desperation.' In *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Vol. 7: Kierkegaard and Human Values*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and M. Mikulvá Thulstrup. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1980.
- Fabro, Cornelio, 'The Problem of Desperation and Christian Spirituality in Kierkegaard.' In *Kierkegaardiana IV*, ed. Niels Thulstrup. Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962.
- Ferguson, Harvie, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity: Søren Kierkegaard's Religious Psychology*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Ferreira, M. Jamie, 'Imagination and the Despair of Sin.' In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1997*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997.
- Ferreira, M. Jamie, *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.
- Gellman, Jerome I., *Abraham! Abraham! Kierkegaard and the Hasidim on the Binding of Isaac*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.
- Gellman, Jerome I., *The Fear, The Trembling, and the Fire: Kierkegaard and the Hasidic Masters on the Binding of Isaac*. Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1994.
- Gilmartin, Thomas V., *Soul-Sickness: a Comparison of William James and Søren Kierkegaard*, Th.D. dissertation, Berkeley, California, 1974.
- González, Darío, 'Sin, Absolute Difference.' In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2003*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser and Jon Stewart. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003.
- Gordon, Haim, 'A Rejection of Kierkegaard's Monism of Despair.' In *International Kierkegaard Commentary 19: The Sickness Unto Death*, ed. Robert L. Perkins. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987.
- Gouwens, David J., *Kierkegaard As Religious Thinker*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Grimsley, Ronald, *Søren Kierkegaard and French Literature: Eight Comparative Studies*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1966.
- Grøn, Arne, 'The Relation Between Part One and Part Two of *The Sickness Unto Death*,' trans. Noel S. Adams. In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1997*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997.
- Haecker, Theodor, *Kierkegaard the Cripple*, trans. C. Van O. Bruyn. London: The Harvill Press, 1948.
- Hamilton, Kenneth, *The Promise of Kierkegaard*. Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1969.
- Hannay, Alastair, *Kierkegaard: A Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Harper, Ralph, *The Seventh Solitude: Metaphysical Homelessness in Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967.
- Hinkson, Craig, 'Luther and Kierkegaard: Theologians of the Cross.' *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3:1 (March 2001).
- Hinkson, Craig Quentin, *Kierkegaard's Theology: Cross and Grace. The Lutheran and Idealistic Traditions in His Thought*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1993.

- Hoberman, John H., 'Kierkegaard on Vertigo.' In *International Kierkegaard Commentary 19: The Sickness Unto Death*, ed. Robert L. Perkins. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987.
- Hojnowski, Peter Edward, *Autonomy, Authenticity and the Flight From God: The Phenomena of Despair and Defiance in the Writings of Søren Kierkegaard and Thomas Aquinas*. Ph.D. dissertation, Fordham University, 1993.
- Huntington, Patricia J., 'Heidegger's Reading of Kierkegaard Revisited: From Ontological Abstraction to Ethical Concretion.' In *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, ed. Martin J. Matušík and Merold Westphal. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Keeley, Louise Carroll, 'Spiritual Trial in the Thought of Kierkegaard.' In *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments,"* ed. Robert L. Perkins. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997.
- Kemp, Peter, 'Another Language for the Other: From Kierkegaard to Levinas.' *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 23:6.
- Khan, Abraham H., 'Melancholy: An Elusive Element of Depression?', *The Journal of Medical Humanities* 15:2 (1994).
- Khan, Abraham H., 'Melancholy, Irony, and Kierkegaard.' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 17 (1985).
- Khan, Abraham H., *Salighed as Happiness? Kierkegaard on the Concept Salighed*. The Kierkegaard Monograph Series, ed. Alastair McKinnon. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1985.
- Kirmmse, Bruce H., *Encounters With Kierkegaard: A Life as Seen by His Contemporaries*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse and Virginia R. Laursen. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Kroenker, Ernest B., 'Søren Kierkegaard on Luther.' In *Interpreters of Luther: Essays in Honor of William Pauck*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968.
- Law, David R., *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- LeFevre, Perry ed., *The Prayers of Kierkegaard*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1956.
- Levinas, Emmanuel, 'Existence and Ethics.' In *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. J. Reé and J. Chamberlain. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998.
- Lindström, Valter, 'The Image of God.' In *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Vol. 5: Theological Concepts in Kierkegaard*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1980.
- Martin, H. V., *Kierkegaard: The Melancholy Dane*. London: The Epworth Press, 1950.
- Martin, H. V., *The Wings of Faith: A consideration of the nature and meaning of Christian faith in the light of the work of Søren Kierkegaard*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1950.
- Malik, Habib, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: the Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997.
- Manheimer, Bruce, *Kierkegaard As Educator*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1977.

- McBride, William L., 'Sartre's Debt to Kierkegaard: A Partial Reckoning.' In *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, ed. Martin J. Matušík and Merold Westphal. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- McCarthy, Vincent A., 'Kierkegaard's Religious Psychology.' In *Kierkegaard's Truth: The Disclosure of the Self*, ed. Joseph H. Smith. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981.
- McCarthy, Vincent A., "'Melancholy' and 'Religious Melancholy' in Kierkegaard.' In *Kierkegaardiana X*, ed. Niels Thusltrup. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1977.
- McCarthy, Vincent A., 'Mourning and Melancholia in 'Quidam's Diary'.' In *International Kierkegaard Commentary Volume 11: Stages on Life's Way*, ed. Robert L. Perkins. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2000.
- McCarthy, Vincent A., *The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard*. The Hague and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978.
- Milbank, John, 'The Sublime in Kierkegaard.' In *Post-Secular Philosophy*, ed. Philip Blond. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Murphy, Nancey and James Wm. McClendon Jr., 'Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies.' *Modern Theology* 5:3 (April 1989).
- Newmark, Kevin, 'Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: The Space of Translation.' In *Modern Critical Views: Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Harold Bloom. New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989.
- Nordentoft, Kresten, *Kierkegaard's Psychology*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978.
- Patrick, Denzil G. M., *Pascal and Kierkegaard: A Study in the Strategy of Evangelism*, Volumes 1 and 2. London and Redhill: Lutterworth Press, 1947.
- Pattison, George, "'Before God" as a Regulative Concept.' In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1997*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997.
- Pattison, George, "'Cosmopolitan Faces": The Presence of the Wandering Jew in *From the Papers of One Still Living*.' In *International Kierkegaard Commentary Volume 1: Early Polemical Writings*, ed. Robert L. Perkins. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1999.
- Pattison, George, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*. London: SCM Press, 1999.
- Pattison, George, 'Kierkegaard and the Sublime.' In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1998*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998.
- Pattison, George, *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth Century Crisis of Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Pattison, George, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, theology, literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Pattison, George, 'Looks of Love: The Seducer and the Christ.' Paper presented at *Kierkegaardian Images of Christ*, The Annual Conference of the Søren Kierkegaard Society of the United Kingdom, University of Manchester, 8th May 2004.
- Pattison, George, 'Sublimity and the Experience of Freedom in Kierkegaard.' In *Kierkegaard and Freedom*, ed. James Giles. Houndsmill: Palgrave, 2000.

- Pedersen, Jørgen, 'Augustine and Augustinianism.' In *A Kierkegaard Critique*, ed. Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1962.
- Poole, Roger, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993.
- Prenter, Regin, 'Luther and Lutheranism.' In *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Vol. 6: Kierkegaard and Great Traditions*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1981.
- Pyper, Hugh S., 'Forgiving the Unforgivable: Kierkegaard, Derrida and the Scandal of Forgiveness.' Paper presented at *Kierkegaard: Between Ethics and Religion*, The 2nd International Conference of the Søren Kierkegaard Society of the United Kingdom, University of Leeds, 5-8 July 2001.
- Quinn, Philip L., 'Does Anxiety Explain Original Sin?' *Nous* 24 (1990).
- Rae, Murray, *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation: By Faith Transformed*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
- Ricoeur, Paul, 'Kierkegaard and Evil.' In *Modern Critical Views: Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Harold Bloom. New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989.
- Rocca, Ettore, 'Søren Kierkegaard on Silence.' In *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Poul Houe, Gordon D. Marino and Sven Hakon Rossel. Amsterdam and Atlanta, Georgia: Rodolphi, 2000.
- Rozema, David L., 'Hegel and Kierkegaard On Conceiving the Absolute.' *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 9:2 (April 1992).
- Sagi, Avi, *Kierkegaard, Religion, and Existence: The Voyage of the Self*, trans. Batya Stein. Amsterdam and Atlanta, Georgia: Rodopi, 2000.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, 'Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal.' In *Modern Critical Views: Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Harold Bloom. New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989.
- Shakespeare, Steven, *Kierkegaard, Language and the Reality of God*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001.
- Sløk, Johannes, 'Kierkegaard and Luther,' trans. A. Roussing. In *A Kierkegaard Critique*, ed. Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1962.
- Smit, Harvey Albert, *Kierkegaard's Pilgrimage of Man: The Road of Self-Positing and Self-Abdication*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965.
- Smith, Joel Robert, *The Dialectic of Selfhood in the Works of Søren Kierkegaard*. Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1977.
- Søe, N. H., 'Anthropology.' In *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Vol. 7: Kierkegaard and Human Values*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and M. Mikulová Thulstrup. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1980.
- Søe, N. H., 'Karl Barth.' In *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Volume 8: the Legacy and Interpretation of Kierkegaard*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and M. Mikulová Thulstrup. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1981.
- Sponheim, Paul, *Kierkegaard on Christ and Christian Coherence*. New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1968.

- Sponheim, Paul, 'Is Forgiveness Enough? A Kierkegaardian Response', *Word and World* 16:3 (Summer 1996).
- Stack, George, 'Kierkegaard and Ethical Existence.' *Ethics* 83:2 (January 1973).
- Stack, George, 'Kierkegaard: The Self as Ethical Possibility.' *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 3 (1972).
- Stewart, Jon, 'Kierkegaard's Phenomenology of Despair in *The Sickness Unto Death*.' In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1997*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997.
- Stewart, Jon, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel Reconsidered*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Taylor, Mark C., 'Journeys to Moriah: Hegel vs. Kierkegaard.' *Harvard Theological Review* 70 (July 1977).
- Taylor, Mark C., *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California and London: University of California Press, 1980.
- Thulstrup, Marie Mikulová, 'Studies of Pietists, Mystics, and Church Fathers.' In *Bibliotheca Kierkegardina Vol. 1: Kierkegaard's View of Christianity*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1978.
- Thulstrup, Niels, *Commentary on Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Robert J. Widenmann. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Thulstrup, Niels, 'Theological and Philosophical Studies.' In *Bibliotheca Kierkegardina Vol. 1: Kierkegaard's View of Christianity*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1978.
- Thulstrup, Niels, 'Trial, Test, Tribulation, Temptation.' In *Bibliotheca Kierkegardina Volume 16: Some of Kierkegaard's Main Categories*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1988.
- Walsh, Sylvia I., 'Patterns For Living Poetically.' In *Søren Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers Volume I*, ed. Daniel W. Conway with K. E. Gover. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Westphal, Merold, 'Commanded Love and Divine Transcendence in Levinas and Kierkegaard.' In *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jeffrey Bloech. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.
- Westphal, Merold, 'Kierkegaard's Climacus – a Kind of Postmodernist.' In *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments,"* ed. Robert L. Perkins. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997.
- Willows, David, *Divine Knowledge: A Kierkegaardian Perspective on Christian Education*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001.
- Wilson, Colin, *Religion and the Rebel*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1957.

General

- Alles, Gregory D., 'Toward a Genealogy of the Holy: Rudolf Otto and the Apologetics of Religion.' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69:2 (June 2001).
- Almond, Philip C., *Rudolf Otto: An Introduction to His Philosophical Theology*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984.
- Altizer, Thomas J. J., 'The Beginning and Ending of Revelation.' In *Theology At The End Of The Century: A Dialogue on the Postmodern*, ed. Robert P. Scharlemann. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1990.
- Altizer, Thomas J. J., *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966.
- Altizer, Thomas J. J., 'The Otherness of God as an Image of Satan.' In *The Otherness of God*, ed. Orrin F. Summerell. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998.
- Altizer, Thomas J. J. and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968.
- Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Albert C. Outter. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1999.
- Auster, Paul, 'Book of the Dead: An Interview with Edmond Jabés.' In *The Sin of the Book: Edmond Jabés*, ed. Eric Gould. Lincoln and London: University and Nebraska Press, 1985.
- Barnes, L. Philip, 'Rudolf Otto and the Limits of Religious Description.' *Religious Studies* 30 (1994).
- Barth, Karl, 'An Introductory Essay.' In Ludvig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Elliot, New York, Evanston, London: Harper and Row, 1957.
- Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics Volume II: The Doctrine of God*, ed. G. W. Bromily and T. F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, J. L. M. Haire. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1957.
- Barth, Karl, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. from 6th edition by Edwyn C. Hoskyns. London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1933.
- Barth, Karl, 'Kierkegaard and the Theologians.' *Canadian Journal of Theology* 13 (1967).
- Barth, Karl, 'A Thank You and a Bow: Kierkegaard's Reveille.' *Canadian Journal of Theology* 11:1 (1965).
- Barthes, Roland, 'Wrestling with the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32:32-32', In *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, ed. Graham Ward. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.
- Baudelaire, Charles, *Les Fleur Du Mal et Oeuvres Choises*. New York: Dover Publications, 1963.
- Baum, Gregory, *Christian Theology After Auschwitz: Robert Waley Memorial Lecture, 1976*. London: The Council of Christians and Jews, 1976.
- Blond, Philip, 'Emmanuel Levinas: God and Phenomenology.' In *Post-Secular Philosophy*, ed. Philip Blond. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Berger, Peter L., *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*. London: The Penguin Press, 1970.
- Blood, Susan, *Baudelaire and the Aesthetics of Bad Faith*. Stanford, California: Stanford University

Press, 1997.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Act and Being*, trans. Bernard Noble. London: Collins, 1962.

Brogan, D. W., *Proudhon*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1934.

Buber, Martin, *Eclipse of God*. New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1957.

Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958.

Burbridge, John W., “‘Unhappy Consciousness’ in Hegel: An Analysis of Medieval Catholicism?” In *The Phenomenology of Spirit Reader: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, ed. Jon Stewart. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998.

Burton, Robert, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. New York: The New York Review of Books, 2001.

Campbell, C. A., *On Selfhood and Godhood*. London: George Allen and Unwin / New York: The MacMillan Company, 1957.

Camus, Albert, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O’Brian. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1975.

Camus, Albert, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1953.

Caputo, John D., ‘God is Wholly Other – Almost: ‘Différance and the Hyperbolic Alterity of God.’ In *The Otherness of God*, ed. Orrin F. Summerell. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998.

Caputo, John D., *On Religion*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.

Capps, Donald, *Men, Religion, and Melancholia: James, Otto, Jung, and Erikson*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997.

Chalier, Catherine, ‘The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and the Hebraic Tradition.’ In *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas For Philosophy*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan, *God and the Holocaust*. Leominster: Gracewing, 1996.

Cooper, Howard, ‘The Cracked Crucible: Judaism and Mental Health.’ In *Psychiatry and Religion: Context, Consensus and Controversies*, ed. Dinesh Bhugra. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

Corngold, Stanley, *The Fate of the Self: German Writers and French Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Cox, Dermot, *Man’s Anger and God’s Silence: The Book of Job*. Middlegreen: St. Paul Publications, 1990.

Cox, Harvey, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968.

Cunningham, Valentine, ‘Roland Barthes (1915-1980): Introduction.’ In *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, ed. Graham Ward. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.

Cupitt, Don, *The Long-Legged Fly: A Theology of Language and Desire*. London: SCM Press, 1987.

Cupitt, Don, *Taking Leave of God*. London: SCM Press, 1980.

Cupitt, Don, *The Time Being*. London: SCM Press, 1992.

Dawson, Lorne, ‘Otto and Freud on the Uncanny and Beyond.’ *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 57:2 (1989).

- De Boer, Theo, 'Theology and the Philosophy of Religion according to Levinas.' In *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas For Philosophy*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.
- De Chardin, Teilhard, 'My Universe.' In *Process Theology: basic writings*, ed. Ewert H. Cousins. New York, Paramus, Toronto: Newman Press, 1971.
- De Lubac, Henri, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. Anne Englund Nash, Edith M. Riley and Mark Sebanc. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995.
- De Lubac, Henri, *The Un-Marxian Socialist: A Study of Proudhon*, trans. R. E. Scantlebury. London: Steed and Ward, 1948.
- Derrida, Jacques, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Derrida, Jacques, 'To Forgive: The Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible.' In *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael Scanlon. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Despland, Michel, 'On Not Solving Riddles Alone.' In *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay. Albany, New York: State University of New York: 1992.
- Dicken, E. W. Trueman, *The Crucible of Love: A Study of the Mysticism of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963.
- Dobzhansky, Theodosius, 'Teilhard de Chardin and the Orientation of Evolution: A Critical Essay.' In *Process Theology: basic writings*, ed. Ewert H. Cousins. New York, Paramus, Toronto: Newman Press, 1971.
- Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959.
- Fabro, Cornelio, *God in Exile: Modern Atheism – A Study of the Internal Dynamic of Modern Atheism, from Its Roots in the Cartesian 'Cogito' to the Present Day*, ed. and trans. Arthur Gibson. New York: Newman Press, 1968.
- Ferguson, Harvie, *The Science of Pleasure: Cosmos and Psyche in the Bourgeois World View*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Feuerbach, Ludvig, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Elliot. New York: Prometheus Books, 1989.
- Fiorenza, Francis Schüssler, 'Being, Subjectivity, Otherness: The Idols of God.' In *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael Scanlon. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Foucault, Michel, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. London: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1972.
- Foucault, Michel, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1970.
- Friedman, Maurice, *Problematic Rebel: Melville, Dostoievsky, Kafka, Camus*. Chicago and London:

- The University of Chicago Press, 1970.
- Frost, Christopher J., *Religious Melancholy or Psychological Depression?* New York and London: University Press of America, 1985.
- Golomb, Jacob, *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Gooch, Todd A., *The Numinous and Modernity: An Interpretation of Rudolf Otto's Philosophy of Religion*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000.
- Greisch, Jean, 'Divine Selfhood and the Postmodern Subject.' In *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael Scanlon. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Hadot, Pierre, *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision*, trans. Michael Chase. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Hamlyn, David W., 'Self-Knowledge.' In *The Self: Psychological and Philosophical Issues*, ed. Theodore Mischel. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977.
- Hampson, Daphne, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Handelman, Susan, "'Torments of an Ancient World": Edmond Jabés and the Rabbinic Tradition.' In *The Sin of the Book: Edmond Jabés*, ed. Eric Gould. Lincoln and London: University and Nebraska Press, 1985.
- Harr, Michael, 'Nietzsche and the Metamorphosis of the Divine.' In *Post-Secular Philosophy*, ed. Philip Blond. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Hart, Kevin, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Aesthetics: Lectures On Fine Art Volume I*, trans. T. M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *The Christian Religion*, trans. Peter C. Hodgson. Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1979.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1977.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Lectures On the Philosophy of Religion Volume 2: Determinate Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, J. M. Stewart and H. S. Harris. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1987.
- Hegel, G. W. F., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Heineken, Martin J., *The Moment Before God*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956.
- Hill, Leslie, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Howard-Snyder, Daniel and Moser, Paul K., ed. *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Hyppolite, Jean, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, ed. and trans. John O'Neill. New York, Evanston, San

- Francisco, London: Harper and Row, 1973.
- Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.
- Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. W. H. Longridge. London: Robert Scott, 1919.
- Ingram, Allan, ed. *Voices of Madness: Four Pamphlets, 1683-1796*. Stroud: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1997.
- Jäger, Alfred, 'The Living God and the Endangered Reality of Life.' In *The Otherness of God*, ed. Orrin F. Summerell. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998.
- James, William, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. London and Glasgow: Collins, 1968.
- Jantzen, Grace M., 'Eros and the Abyss: Reading Medieval Mystics in Postmodernity.' *Literature and Theology* 17:3 (September 2003).
- John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*. Cambridge: James Clark and Co., 1973.
- John of the Cross, *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross: Doctor of the Church* (3 volumes), ed. and trans. E. Allison Peers. London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1934-35.
- Juan de los Angeles, *The Loving Struggle Between God and the Soul*, trans. Eladia Gómez-Posthill. London: The Saint Austin Press, 2001.
- Jung, C. G., *Answer to Job*, trans. R. F. C. Hull. London: Ark Paperbacks, 1984.
- Jüngel, Eberhard, *Death: The Riddle and the Mystery*. Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, 1975.
- Jüngel, Eberhard, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1983.
- Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard. New York and London: Hafner Publishing Company, 1966.
- Kant, Immanuel, *The Metaphysics of Ethics*. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1869.
- Kant, Immanuel, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- Kaufmann, Walter, ed. and trans. *The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.
- Kazantzakis, Nikos, *Report To Greco*. London: Faber and Faber, 1973.
- Kazantzakis, Nikos, *The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kimon Friar. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960.
- Kearney, Richard, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Kristeva, Julia, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiaz. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.
- Lake, Frank, *Clinical Theology: A Theological and Psychiatric Basis to Clinical Pastoral Care*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966.
- Lang, Berel, 'Writing-the-Holocaust: Jabés and the Measure of History.' In *The Sin of the Book: Edmond Jabés*, ed. Eric Gould. Lincoln and London: University and Nebraska Press, 1985.
- Lattke, Michael, 'Rudolf Bultmann on Rudolf Otto.' *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985).

- Lepenes, Wolf, *Melancholy and Society*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris Jones. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Levinas, Emmanuel, 'A Man-God?' In *entre nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Levinas, Emmanuel, 'Enigma and Phenomenon.' In *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Levinas, Emmanuel, 'Meaning and Sense.' In *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Levinas, Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.
- Levinas, Emmanuel, 'Transcendence and Height.' In *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Levinas, Emmanuel, 'Useless Suffering.' In *entre nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Lipsedge, Maurice, 'Religion and Madness in History.' In *Psychiatry and Religion: Context, Consensus and Controversies*, ed. Dinesh Bhugra. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Llewelyn, John, 'Amen.' In *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas For Philosophy*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.
- Loder, James E., *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998.
- Luther, Martin, 'Devotional Writings I.' In *Luther's Works*, Vol. 42, ed. Martin O. Dietrich. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969.
- Luther, Martin, 'Sermons I.' In *Luther's Works*, Vol. 51, ed. John W. Doberstein. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959.
- Luther, Martin, 'Sermons II.' In *Luther's Works*, Vol. 52, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974.
- Luther, Martin, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, ed. and trans. William Hazlitt. London: H. G. Bohn, 1857.
- Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Confession of St. Augustine*, trans. Richard Beardsworth. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.
- Lyotard, Jean-François, *Postmodern Fables*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Macintyre, Alasdair and Paul Ricoeur, *The Religious Significance of Atheism*. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969.
- Macquarrie, John, *Heidegger and Christianity*. London: SCM Press, 1994.

- Maio, Eugene A., *St. John of the Cross: The Imagery of Eros*. Madrid: Playor, S. A., 1973.
- Marion, Jean-Luc, *God Without Being: Hors Texte*, trans. Thomas H. Carlson. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Marius, Richard, *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.
- McNeill, John T., *A History of the Cure of Souls*. London: SCM Press, 1952.
- Minney, Robert, 'The Development of Otto's Thought 1889-1917: From *Luther's View of the Holy Spirit* to *The Holy*.' *Religious Studies* 26 (1990).
- Moltmann, Jürgen, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. London: SCM Press, 1974.
- Moltmann, Jürgen, *God in creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl. London: SCM Press, 1985.
- Nayani, Tony and Bhugra, Dinesh, 'Guilt, Religion and Ritual.' In *Psychiatry and Religion: Context, Consensus and Controversies*, ed. Dinesh Bhugra. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. Volume I Human Nature*. London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1941.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard, 'Foreword.' In Feuerbach, Ludvig, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Elliot. New York, Evanston, London: Harper and Row, 1957.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufman. New York: Random House, 1966.
- Nishitani, Keiji, *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, trans. Graham Parkes with Setsuko Aihara. Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1990.
- Oberman, Heiko A., *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 1992.
- Olsen, Carl, *The Theology and Philosophy of Eliade: A Search for the Centre*. Houndsmill: Macmillan, 1992.
- Otto, Rudolf, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry Into the Non-Rational in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey. London: Oxford University Press, 1924.
- Otto, Rudolf, *Naturalism and Religion*, ed. W. D. Morrison, trans. J. Arthur Thomson and Margaret R. Thomson. London: Williams and Norgate / New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913.
- Otto, Rudolf, *The Philosophy of Religion: Based on Kant and Fries*, trans. E. B. Dicker. London: Williams and Norgate, 1931.
- Otto, Rudolf, *Religious Essays: A Supplement to 'The Idea of the Holy'*, trans. Brian Lunn. London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1937.
- Pascal, Blaise, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966.
- Pattison, George, *Agnosis: Theology in the Void*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1996.
- Pawlikowski, John T., 'Christology after the Holocaust.' *Theology Digest* 47:1 (Spring 200).
- Peacocke, John, 'Heidegger and the Problem of Onto-Theology.' In *Post-Secular Theology*, ed. Philip Blond. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Pensy, Max, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning*. Amherst: The

- University of Massachusetts Press, 1993.
- Peperzak, Adriaan T., 'Transcendence.' In *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas For Philosophy*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.
- Perkins, Judith, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973.
- Plotinus, *Collected Writings of Plotinus*, trans. Thomas Taylor. Somerset: The Prometheus Trust, 1994.
- Poland, Lynn, 'The Idea of the Holy and the History of the Sublime.' *Journal of Religion* 72 (1992).
- Praz, Mario, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.
- Raphael, Melissa, 'Feminism, Constructivism and Numinous Experience.' *Religious Studies* 39 (1994).
- Raphael, Melissa, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
- Raposa, Michael L., *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1999.
- Raschke, Carl A., 'The Deconstruction of God.' In *Deconstruction and Theology*, ed. Thomas J. J. Altizer, Max A. Myers, Carl A. Raschke, Robert P. Sharlemann, Mark C. Taylor, Charles E. Winkquist. New York: Crossroad, 1982.
- Robins, Jill, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Robins, Jill, 'Tracing Responsibility in Levinas's Ethical Thought.' In *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas For Philosophy*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.
- Rubenstein, Mary-Jane, 'Unknow Thyself: Apophaticism, Deconstruction, and Theology After Ontotheology.' *Modern Theology* 19:3 (July 2003).
- Rubenstein, Richard L., *After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Rubenstein, Richard L. and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Legacy of the Holocaust*. London: SCM Press, 1987.
- Rupp, Gordon, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes. London: Routledge, 1969.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Words*, trans. Irene Clephane. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964.
- Scharlemann, Robert P., 'The Being of God When God Is Not Being God: Deconstructing the History of Theism.' In *Deconstruction and Theology*, ed. Thomas J. J. Altizer, Max A. Myers, Carl A. Raschke, Robert P. Scharlemann, Mark C. Taylor, Charles E. Winkquist. New York: Crossroad, 1982.
- Scharlemann, Robert P., ed. *Theology At The End Of The Century: A Dialogue on the Postmodern*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1990.
- Schöndorf, Harold, 'The Othering (Becoming Other) and Reconciliation of God in Hegel's

- Phenomenology of Spirit.*' In *The Phenomenology of Spirit Reader: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, ed. Jon Stewart. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998.
- Schwarz, Hans, 'The Contemporary Relevance of Luther's Insistence on the Otherness of God.' In *The Otherness of God*, ed. Orrin F. Summerell. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998.
- Screech, M. A., *Montaigne and Melancholy: The Wisdom of the Essays*. London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 1983.
- Shrag, Calvin O., *The Self After Postmodernity*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Sontag, Frederick, *The God of Evil: An Argument from the Existence of the Devil*. New York, Evanston and London: Harper and Row, 1970.
- Sorabji, Richard, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Stoker, Wessel, *Is the Quest for Meaning the Quest for God? The Religious Ascription of Meaning in Relation to the Secular Ascription of Meaning*, trans. Lucy Jansen-Hofland and Henry Jansen. Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi B.V., 1996.
- Taubes, Susan, 'The Absent God.' In *Toward A New Christianity: Readings in the Death of God Theology*, ed. Thomas J. J. Altizer. New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967.
- Taylor, Charles, *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Taylor, Charles, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Taylor, Mark C., *Deconstructing Theology*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company / Chicago: Scholar's Press, 1982.
- Taylor, Mark C., *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Taylor, Mark C., 'Postmodern Times.' In *The Otherness of God*, ed. Orrin F. Summerell. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998.
- Thielman, Samuel B., 'Reflections on the Role of Religion in the History of Psychiatry.' In *Handbook of Religion and Mental Health*, ed. Harold G. Koenig. London and San Diego, California: Academic Press, 1998.
- Thorson, James A., 'Religion and Anxiety: Which Anxiety? Which Religion?' In *Handbook of Religion and Mental Health*, ed. Harold G. Koenig. London and San Diego, California: Academic Press, 1998.
- Tillich, Paul, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1-3. Hertfordshire: James Nisbet and Co., 1968.
- Tillich, Paul, *The Courage To Be*. London: Nisbet and Co., 1952.
- Tillich, Paul, *The Protestant Era*, trans. James Luther Adams. London: Nisbet and Co., 1951.
- Tolstoy, Leo, *A Confession and Other Religious Writings*, trans. Jane Kentish. London: Penguin Books, 1987.
- Tracy, David, 'Response to Adriaan Peperzak on Transcendence.' In *Ethics as First Philosophy: The*

- Significance of Emmanuel Levinas For Philosophy*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.
- Turner, Denys, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Vahanian, Gabriel, *The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era*. New York: Georges Braziller, 1961.
- Vawter, Bruce, *Job and Jonah: Questioning the Hidden God*. New York: The Paulist Press, 1983.
- Ward, Graham, ed. *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.
- Weil, Simone, *Gravity and Grace*. London: Routledge, 1963.
- Westphal, Merold, 'Faith As The Overcoming of Ontological Xenophobia.' In *The Otherness of God*, ed. Orrin F. Summerell. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998.
- Westphal, Merold, *God, Guilt and Death: An Existential Phenomenology of Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Westphal, Merold, *Overcoming Onto-Theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2001.
- Westphal, Merold, *Suspicion and Faith: The Religious Uses of Modern Atheism*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993.
- Wettstein, Howard, 'Doctrine.' *Faith and Philosophy* 14:4 (October 1997).
- Whitehead, Alfred North, *Process and Reality: An essay in cosmology*. New York: The Free Press, 1969.
- Whitehead, Alfred North, *Religion in the Making*. New York: Macmillan, 1926.
- Wiesel, Elie, 'Art and Culture after the Holocaust.' In *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, ed. Eva Fleischner. New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1977.
- Wiesel, Elie, *Four Hasidic Masters and Their Struggle Against Melancholy*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978.
- Wiesel, Elie, *From the Kingdom of Memory*. New York: Schocken Books, 1990.
- Wolfson, Elliot, *Through a Speculum That Shines*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Woodcock, George, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: His Life and Work*. New York: Schocken Books, 1972.

